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'The Group With the Flag': Mine Hostels As Contested Institutions

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A majority--almost 99 per cent--of African miners live in mine hostels. These are single-sex quarters located close to mine shafts, and they service the labour needs of individual mines. In the past they have also been called compounds, to refer to the time when the mine quarters were basic and primitive facilities, with large rooms in some instances accommodating up to 90 miners in their public space, no private ablution, toilet facilities, electricity, and minimal, modest service provision.[1] Corporate embarrassment about compound life, brought about in part by a number of academic studies published in the 1970s[2], motivated the mining houses to reform and improve the mine residence, and substantial sums of money were pumped into upgrading, and, as Merle Lipton put it, ameliorating the conditions of mine life.[3] Room size and propinquity were reduced, private ablution and toilet facilities provided, electricity was supplied, and recreation and bar facilities became part of the hostel environment. The compounds were modernised quite considerably in the 1970s, and part of the modernisation was a change also in nomenclature; they became known as hostels, a term denoting mass residence, but free of

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more or less guaranteed a physically competent work force.[5]

It is also true that, since it was first put in place almost a century ago, the compound has been a most important device by which the mine labour force has been sheltered from politics. During the 1980s, as this chapter will show, the mine labour force was irreversibly incorporated into politics, and took a leading role in the politics of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), the largest union federation in the nation today. But whether it was with the 1920 and 1946 black miners' strikes, the mine disturbances of the 1970s, and even the 1980s, when the unionization of the African labour force took place, entry and access to compounds, whether by trade unionists or political activists, was regulated strictly by management. For the better part of its history, it was management's gatekeeping the compounds that insulated the miners from a developing political culture of resistance in the townships of South Africa. When management lost control over access to compounds in the 1980s, albeit temporarily, the labour force burst forth with surprising militancy.

Along similiar lines, disturbances involving African miners invited security measures which turned the hostels into jails, and by locking workers in, potential strike action could easily be broken. T. Dunbar Moodie documented in the case of the 1946 African miners' strike the facility of the compound to serve also as a jail, which, combined with security pressure, broke that

particular strike.[6] During an earlier case, Frederick A. Johnstone tells the story of how during the 1920 black miners' strike, 9 000 African miners in four mines refused to work, and " ... in response to this, the army was called in, and it surrounded and entered the compounds, and the Director of Native Labour ... gave the striking workers the choice of returning to work or being arrested."[7] Again, in later periods, the physical and political architecture of the compound made possible its transformation into an instrument of security and repression, which was precisely part of the purpose behind its construction and, later, modification.[8]

In this chapter, the functions of the mine hostels are considered against a background where and when managerial control over hostels could no longer be taken for granted. The circumstances were special and unusual--the three week long black miners' strike of August 1987--and ought not to be seen as a typical pattern of class conflict on the mines. But it is precisely under circumstances where class conflict is greatest that the contradictions of social institutions are best highlighted, that the weaknesses of management and the strengths of workers are illustrated, and where the inability of social institutions like the hostel to reproduce a labour repressive order is made very clear for all, especially those subject to its discipline, to see. In other words, it is during an unusual event such as a strike that the capacities of actors, be

they management or workers, to maintain or subvert a historically created order, are mostly clearly demonstrated.

The account that follows is based on sources which cover two large mines, one in the West Rand and another in the Far West Rand. Material on events at a large Orange Free State mine will also be used occasionally. The author, unfortunately, is not at liberty to reveal the identity of the mines, for fear that by doing so informants will be compromised and placed at risk. Therefore, in the narrative, the mines are referred to as West Rand mine, Far West Rand mine and Orange Free State mine. Furthermore, and for the same reason, the identity of the major sources used to describe particular events that occurred at the mine hostels cannot be revealed. Wherever possible, publicly available sources are used, and are cited as evidence. But the bulk of the evidence cannot, unfortunately, be acknowledged at this time. The author seeks to assure the reader of the faithful use of these sources, which are of undoubted veracity.

New Rules Under Strike Conditions

Normally, mine hostels are run and administered by mine management. A hostel staff would be responsible for the preparation and serving of food, the physical maintenance of facilities, and the provision of essential services. Again, under normal circumstances, the delivery of these services underwrites managerial authority to call workers to shift, en masse. It is

as if in exchange for the provision of certain essential domestic services management feels entitled to intervene in the domestic lives of black miners for work-related reasons, such as collectively rousing and processing the workers to a shift of work underground.

While management in the past controlled hostels, the control was never total, and since the unionization of the black work force in the 1980s, that control has become seriously attenuated. For it is also true that in as much as the hostel can be an instrument of managerial authority, it can also, under very specific circumstances, become an instrument of union authority. During a strike situation, when the union leadership desires and wishes to enforce maximum abstention from work, the hostel is a central device by which strike action can be policed and enforced. To control the hostel is to have in hand the power to enforce a strike action.

During the first week of the strike (August 7-14, 1987), it was management's intelligence that the union desired to prolong the strike by sending workers home, that they would be recalled once, it was hoped, the Chamber of Mines met the union's demands, and that strike committees will stay behind in hostels to ensure that workers who do not go home do not go to work either.[9] Management was well aware of the critical role the hostels would play in the strike. Various members of the NUM leadership gave advanced warning about their intention to seize

control of the hostels, and alerted management of their strategy to subvert hostel governance.10

At the time, the union sought maximum access to the hostels, precisely because by doing so it could through its strike committee (made up of mine level union members), enforce the strike action, and impair management's capacity to break the strike. The union thus insisted that there be no restriction on freedom of movement, that union officials be allowed normal rights of access, and that mine security personnel be allowed access to hostels only when accompanied by union officials. The union further made the rather odd request, that "South African Police or security forces will not be invited on to mine premises without prior consultation with and the consent of the union head office"11, as if the union would ever consent to the presence of the South African Police or security forces on mine property ! But the point nevertheless was that in order to wage a successful strike, it was to the union's advantage to gain access and eventually control the hostels.

During the course of the strike, at a number of mine major mines, the union essentially controlled the hostels for the strike's duration, though the control was uneven, erratic, and not always very successful. In the example of a West Rand mine, the union's strike committee controlled entry and exit into hostels (of everyone save hostel residents), the provision of food to residents, and subverted management's capacity to call

the shift and to get workers underground. As the strike proceeded it became the tacit understanding of management and workers on the mine level that the rules governing the hostel during a strike situation had changed. On a day to day level management behaved as if the union controlled the hostel, and did very little to alter the new rules of hostel governance.

The shift in governance can be illustrated by events at the West Rand mine. At first, after a meeting held between the NUM branch and mine management, it was agreed that the branch committee may control the strike and that management will still manage the hostels. But the union took over the kitchens and canteens, began to refuse management entry to the hostels (when it was possible to enforce it), only allowed service and repair workers entry under the supervision of union members, and gatekept the hostel by issuing yellow tickets to workers who had permission to leave and enter. Four days after it was agreed that management will still manage the hostels the hostel manager was told that his responsibility ends at the entrance of the hostel, that all responsibility for the kitchen lay with them, and not with him.

The hostel manager did little to regain control over the kitchens. His concern was not so much that workers would be badly fed (which they presumably were, as the union was hardly skilled to produce and serve such large quantities of food, though it tried unsuccessfully at times), but that equipment and

kitchen facilities would be damaged. He was therefore always happy to note that the union kept the kitchens clean, that equipment was fully functional, and when they were not, went to great lengths to have these repaired. The strike committee, and the branch committee of the union, were not capable of fully servicing the hostels, and regularly turned to the hostel manager for assistance. For example, after a meeting between the parties, and after the strike committee made a series of requests, the hostel manager agreed to supply the committee with meal tickets, toilet cleaning materials, and electrical globes. He also promised to assist with garbage removal, with spillages in the kitchen and said he would ask the electricians to attend to electrical outlet and plug problems. He agreed with the strike committee's request that the electricians would only gain entry to the hostel if accompanied by a strike committee member. In return for these, the hostel manager requested the strike committee to hand over all disciplinary cases. While he hardly loved the strike committee, and while he was constantly (and rudely) reminded to remain in the office and not to go into the hostel at all, there nevertheless was a unspoken agreement about spheres of authority; the strike and union branch committees ran the hostel, albeit at times with hostel management's assistance, and though the hostel manager complained about his lost and subverted authority, he did very little to regain it during the strike.[12]

Kitchens, Food, and Other Domestic Matters

It was noted earlier that one of the primary functions of the hostel, under normal conditions, is to mass feed the work force. It is one of the many characteristics of the hostel that is reason for its being regarded a 'total institution', much like a prison or mental institution.[13] Like the prison or mental institution, the residents of the hostel are fed, and do not feed themselves.

At the beginning of the strike, it was the union's request to the Chamber of Mines that food provision at all member mines continue as normal, at no additional cost to the workers involved.[14] This was in part a response to a threat, emanating from one of the larger mine houses that workers on strike will be charged for food consumed. As early as the first week of July, a month before the strike began, regional managers of the mine house in question were advised that in the event of a strike to deduct both food and accommodation charges from striking workers, and that the caveat should be used to persuade workers not to go on strike; the workers were to be told that management will charge employees for food and accommodation if they refused to work normally.[15] The union's request for normal food provision at no additional cost to the workers thus received little sympathy, and the Chamber of Mines concurred with the view of the mine house that "the employer is ... not obliged to pay him

in cash or in kind for the period he is on strike and would be fully entitled to recover the cost of food and accommodation provided."[16] The Chamber claimed that to charge for food was not in law an unfair labour practice, though the use of food as a behaviour modification device, begs many a moral question.

In the theatre of class conflict, however, it is not morality but partisan advantage that matters, and the union was not allowed to have its cake and eat it too. If it wished a strike upon the industry, it had to take a number of penalties, one of which was to feed the work force. The union, and its strike committees, were hardly equipped to take on this additional burden, and through the course of the strike there were many complaints about the quality of food preparation and service. As noted earlier, the union stood to gain a great deal, however, by its control over the hostel. The provision of food underwrote the union's more general authority to run the hostel, and took out of management's hand the power to manipulate food to its advantage. In one instance, at the Far West Rand mine, the same day that the strike committee and mine management formally agreed that management still controlled the hostels, the union took over the hostel kitchens and dining halls, and were clipping meal tickets. The hostel manager was extremely displeased by the breach of verbal contract, finding upon arrival in the kitchen two union men clipping meal tickets. He reminded them of the morning's meeting agreement, and asked for

their names.

The strike committee was not in the position, however, to feed the work force with its own resources, and had to rely on some level of co-operation with management. Firstly, and despite the earlier threats, the union relied on management to supply the food, and allow its delivery to the hostels. Secondly, since the strike committee did not have access to a staff of cooks, the retention of services of the kitchen personnel, which were under the control of management, was essential. At no time during the strike did management either prevent the delivery of food or turned the cooks away from the hostels. The cooks, unclear about their status during the strike, erratically catered in the hostels, but that is another story. From the point of view of the strike committee, if management provided the food and the kitchen staff, all it had to do was control and police the process of food preparation and service.

At first, with the strike young and the strikers enthusiastic, the strike committee kept its hand efficiently on the kitchens. In one instance, at the West Rand mine, a member of management reported that all staff were on duty, that breakfast was prepared, that the union had chased out unit prefects from the dining halls and kitchens, and have taken over the clipping of meal tickets. The manager returned from the kitchens, and without alarm reported further that the feeding of the workers

was in progress, that the union was still in charge, and that there were no problems. At another occasion, at the same mine, the hostel manager was disturbed by the accumulated dirt in the kitchens, but found everything to be in order, otherwise.

However, as the strike wore on, the capacity of the strike committee to maintain this level of performance deteriorated. This was as a result, mainly, of the breakdown of equipment, in the kitchens and elsewhere, and their tardy repair, when they were repaired. In one instance (at the Free State mine), the computerised feeding system in one hostel broke down. In another, at the West Rand mine, the badge reading machine, and the kitchen computer, both part of the computerised feeding system, would not read the workers' identification cards. At the same mine at another time, the dishwasher broke down. Some of these problems were recurrent, and the solution under normal (i.e. non-strike) circumstances was constant, hands-on, servicing. But because the strike committee wanted to strictly control entry and exit to hostels, and insisted on accompanying all outsiders, especially those suspected as management's spies or otherwise untrustworthy, such as the service and repair men, these problems were slowly attended to, and some were not repaired at all. The observation can be more broadly illustrated by looking at all hostel services, in addition to those of the kitchen.

At the West Rand mine, the strike committee requested the

union and management was scheduled to discuss the kitchen situation. The meeting wasn't held. Management claimed that the union representatives did not turn up for the meeting. After another four days, NUM and management reached an agreement regarding a solution to the boiler problem, and agreed that mine security could now escort the engineers into the hostel. After yet another four days (which makes it ten days after the boiler broke down), and despite the fact that an agreement was signed earlier, neither security nor the engineers could gain access to the hostel. Perhaps, in this particular instance, the union had little control (and authority) over the hostel residents, which would explain why their agreements with management could not easily be upheld.

At another hostel (Far West Rand mine) the dishwasher had broken down in the kitchen, and a water pipe burst at the changehouse (where employees change into work attire). The strike committee requested the services of an electrician, but the hostel manager himself wanted access to the kitchen and changehouse to assess the situation first-hand. It was essential, he claimed, that maintenance personnel has to get into the kitchen and changehouse. The union refused the hostel manager and the maintenance crews access to the hostel. Instead, the strike committee collected the electrician, took him to the affected hostel, and presumably the problem was fixed. In another case, the electricity went out in an entire block of

rooms. No lights and no heaters were the complaint. The electrician tried to gain access, but it wasn't possible at the time because there was nobody to escort him in. Later in the day, the electrician found his union escort, and all the electrical problems in the hostel were subsequently repaired.

The story could easily be repeated for other service breakdowns; because the strike committees ran the hostels, and maintained a strict regime of gatekeeping, simple servicing and repair work of physical plant and equipment were often problematic. It was management's concern that the problems with servicing and repair would get out of hand, leading to permanent, and expensive, breakdown. In the end there were no really serious problems, except in the case of the breakdown of the boiler, where the mine house involved wanted to take the union to court, to sue for damages. The somewhat clumsy policing procedures set up by the strike committees, in some hostels simply to prevent management from undermining their control, resulted in inefficient and deteriorating hostel governance; understandably, the union did not initially plan to nor was it equipped to take on hostel governance on a permanent basis. Towards the end of the strike, hostel governance was squarely back in the hands of management.

The hostel manager, his staff and mine security, whether out of fear or grudging respect, recognized the strike committee's regime in the hostels. Of course, since everyone knew

that the regime was temporary, and that it had to come to an end sooner or later, such recognition does not come at a high price. The strike committee, and the larger union network of which it was part, were confident that they were running the hostel, but depended on hostel management for food and other supplies, as well as for repair and servicing work.[18] The spheres of authority drawn during the strike were thus mutually respected, best illustrated by the following narrative. The hostel manager requested from the strike committee some powdered milk, which was kept in the hostel kitchens, and the committee turned it down. The committee claimed that whites were not entitled to rations, only blacks. They further claimed that if the hostel manager wanted something he must ask (which he did), and even if he was still the boss, they were running the hostel.

Subverting Managerial Authority

During the course of a normal working day at a gold mine, three shifts of work are normally completed. These shifts are announced or called over a public address system, collectively rousing to work those miners assigned to a particular shift. The first shift of the day is usually called at about 3 a.m., and it would take anywhere between two to three hours after the shift has been called for the miners to reach the actual working, or, stopeface. As noted before, the fact that the miners live in hostels located close to the mine shaft makes the process

relatively easy, as management has the capacity to rouse and regiment miners to work. The hostel also allowed management to police absenteeism (a simple survey of the hostel would establish who is absent).

During a strike situation it is in the union's interest to keep as many miners away from work, and if the miners are not sent home, to keep as many as possible also within the confines of the hostel. In this situation the union can encourage and forge a solidarity among striking miners, the collective conscience can be made to prevail, and if necessary, the strike committee can enforce the strike action by physically preventing miners from going to work. Under circumstances where a universal solidarity among miners prevails, the strike action is very successful, both because it makes manifest the union's ultimate sanction of withholding labour, and because it serves as a prophylactic against management's counter-strategies aimed at breaking the strike.

Not in one instance during the 1987 strike did the union obtain universal, voluntary abstention from work. In some instances, the level of participation in the strike correlated with the strength of the union at a particular mine or group of mines; so that, for example, because the union was weakly represented at mines affiliated with the Goldfields group, participation in the strike action was marginal, in contrast to Anglo American mines, where union strength and strike

participation was high.[19] In other instances, the most vulnerable groups of workers in the labour market, those who would find it difficult to obtain alternative employment, such as many if not all foreign workers, resisted taking part in the strike action. And in yet other instances, for those miners who feared losing employment, who disagreed perhaps with the union, or who were closer to management than to the union, participation in the strike action had attached too many costs. Whatever the particular reason, the union could not count on a universal solidarity, (in fact faced a declining solidarity as the strike wore on) and as a result developed strategies to maximise strike participation, even in the face of resistance.

One strategy was simply to physically prevent miners from leaving the hostel or entering the shaft.[20] This was used often enough, and to great effect, but it was the union's final sanction, used when all else failed. (Even at the beginning of the strike, when worker solidarity is expected to be highest, the union was enforcing obedience; at the West Rand mine, management reported that union men were stopping workers from going down.)[21] Management self-righteously referred to these behaviours as intimidation, which on one level it clearly was, but another level was simply the old sociological problem of maintaining a collective solidarity in the face of known and unknown, potential, defection, when the relative balance of costs and benefits of withholding one's labour are unevenly

distributed in the labour force. For the union, it was relatively costly to use the final sanction (it caused bad press, discredited the union, but more serious was the possibility that the union might lose sympathisers and members in the labour force when it went beyond the threshold of tolerable coercion, without knowing what the threshold was.) Moreover, the union lacked the physical capacity to extensively police and to deal with every act of deviance, so that even though the union used the final sanction often enough, it relied more systematically on strategies which were designed to subvert and hold in check management's attempts to get workers back to work.

One such strategy was to prevent management from calling the shift and from broadcasting its propaganda over the public address system. During the first week of the strike, when the level of solidarity among workers was high, the calling of the shift and the use of the public address system for management propaganda were non-issues for the union. Typically, the shifts were called, but no response was forthcoming from the striking workers. During this week, every shift was called over the public address system in spite of the strike, and the hostel residents were bombarded with management propaganda over the public address system, and no one particularly was bothered by this. At times, management propaganda--"briefs" as they are called by management--would be replayed every 10 minutes.[22]

Once, however, worker solidarity began to weaken, and

some of the workers began to doubt the wisdom of their action, the divisive tactics of management took on a new meaning, and urgency. Yesterday's innocuous propaganda becomes today's poison; again, it is common occurrence to blame an outside party or agency for a declining solidarity, particularly when the behaviour of that party is in any case cause for protest. Thus, as the strike wore on, the mine public address system became a battleground between management and the union, and access to the facility a major goal of both parties. At the West Rand mine, it was during the second week of the strike that the hostel manager reported that he sent someone to broadcast over the public address system when he was grabbed by members of the NUM. The manager sent a member of mine security to rescue the person.

The union members became adamant that management had no right to call the shift. In one case members of the union walked into the hostel manager's office (West Rand mine) and asked him who gave him the right to call the shift ? The union's argument in support of its members' behaviour was three-fold; firstly, that the calling of the shift was tantamount to a denial of the strike action, and thus provocative. Secondly, that if workers were to respond to the calling of shift, most would not be fit or ready to work. And thirdly, the union feared that workers might indeed respond to the calling of the shift, and that one way of coping with this was to shut the messenger up. In one

the broadcast room. At yet another hostel the operator was sent to broadcast over the PA system and was allegedly grabbed by members of the union. Mine security was sent to go and get him out.

Calling the shift was one cause for dispute. Another cause was the broadcasting of management propaganda. The public address system was used to broadcast what are known as briefs, which would be messages from corporate head office, regional management or mine level management, for the workers. For example, just before the strike began, one of the mine houses's head office instructed mine level management to issue a brief which included items head office thought ought to be conveyed to the workers, including the advice that the workers "will lose wages", "put your jobs at risk", "if you strike you will not get more wages", "if you strike, you will actually lose pay and bonus and will also be charged for board and lodging", and that "the national executive is not going to lose anything as a result of any strike." Through the course of the strike, head office regularly sent briefs via mine level management to the workers, updating them on corporate views regarding the strike's progress.

Briefs broadcasted over the public address irritated the union members greatly, simply because the union regarded these a source of disinformation and counter-intelligence. The briefs compounded the union's problem with the calling of the shift, and simply aggravated the feelings about the public address

system, and justified further its disruption. In one extreme case, the public address system was disconnected and destroyed. In another case, the union members were so disgruntled about the corporate propaganda, they wanted to come up to the office and rip the PA system out. But these were extreme examples of the more general point; that the union and its strike committees, backed up at times by workers, sought to counteract management's wish to tempt workers back to work during the strike.

And, at times, the effort was successful. In numerous cases, it was simply physically impossible to use the public address system. On the other hand, management yielded to union pressure and stopped calling the shift and playing the briefs. During the second week of the strike, at the West Rand mine, the hostel staff was told that the shift was not to be called out any more. By the third week of the strike, however, management had restored full control over the public address system, and returned to the routine of calling the shift and reading the briefs. The union's disruption of the public address system was temporary and strike bound.

The Group With the Flag

A central social mechanism by which solidarity among workers was promoted, and which was a demonstration of power designed to intimidate management and keep in line workers disaffected with the strike, was mass mobilisation. On the mines, during the

strike, the marching and growing crowd, singing songs and shouting slogans, and carrying the large NUM or COSATU flag, were powerful symbolic demonstrations of worker power, directed principally but not exclusively at management.

Firstly, if the crowd was meant to intimidate management, and to remind them of worker power beyond that of the bargaining table, it certainly succeeded in its aim, by bringing to the fore some very powerful racial anxieties. One such anxiety was the fear of the black mob. At the West Rand mine, in one episode, a group of black workers, flying the NUM flag, began to move from one hostel to another, in an attempt to promote solidarity among striking employees, and to intimidate management. Management sources referred to the workers always as a mob; "mob moving to block ", "mob moves again", and so on. Mine security was alerted, a helicopter was brought out to circle overhead, extra security personnel was brought in from other hostels, and Caspirs (military vehicles designed and used for riot control purposes by the South African Police, some of which were purchased by mine houses for mine security purposes) were alerted. None of the heavy armour was used, nor were they at all necessary, for the behaviour of the crowd was within socially acceptable limits. Management videotaped and photographed the whole episode, and asked the technicians to have the developed material the next day. The point of the exercise was to intimidate management, which it did. The tactics were good;

move around in a large and growing group, sing and wave the flag, and management brings out all the security hardware.

The symbolic power of the group is also illustrated by the somewhat mystical and almost personalised qualities granted to groups of blacks by management. In one case, a group of black workers, (and not a very large group, about 150 workers), were seen to be marching to the main gate of the hostel. "Mob tried to close roller shutter door", "pushed one aside to prevent mob closing the door", "mob unhappy", was management's response. In another case, after an afternoon of mass mobilisation, the hostel manager reported that "the singing mob have disappeared and gone to sleep." The group with the flag, rallying the masses, is almost Kafkaesque; "The group with the flag," was one report,

> on their way to the main gate, began to grow in strength. The group, which now seems much bigger and noisier than on 10 August, still on its way to the main gate. A second group seems to be following the first. This is not the same group as the group with the flag. There is another group at the gate--about 300 people. This is the group with the flag. The group moved into the hostel. The group stopped at the church and appeared to be having a meeting. The group with the flag continued towards the main gate, singing heartily.

Secondly, a further function of mass mobilisation was to attain good attendance for union meetings, and to deal with the so-called free rider problem. In the sociological literature, the free rider problem is described as the situation where individuals do not participate in the collective effort but

benefit from its consequences, literally to take a free ride off the efforts of others.[23] Taken to the extreme, if every individual in a group was to be a free rider, if everyone was to believe that others would do the work, there would be no collective action. In the face of this, individuals participating in a group action will always be inclined to develop a device which can minimise the free rider problem, by incorporate as many participants as possible in the collective behaviour. Mass mobilisation thus serves as a form of moral persuasion.[24]

Often, just before meetings were to be held, groups of workers would go from hostel to hostel, singing and with flag flying, collecting more and more workers on their way. Under the circumstances, the power of the disapproving group could not be resisted, and any free rider would be morally dragged along to the frequently held meetings. In an extreme example where the NUM flag itself acquired magical qualities, management reported that "NUM flag with about 20-50 people left the main gate--went down into the hostel on a recruiting spree." The NUM representative called the people from all sides and they are all joining the group. There was definitely a meeting in the area."

Policing the Strike

In the final analysis, the real power of the union and strike committee was their capacity to directly control the

behaviour of workers resident in hostels, and ultimately to mete out punishment of one sort of another for the infringement of formal and implicit rules, put in place during the strike. From the very beginning of the strike, union members policed the behaviour of non-union members, and those who were inclined to cross the picket line. Workers who wanted to go to work, were physically prevented from doing so. In one case, a sizeable group of (mostly) Mozambicans wanted to go to work; they were turned back by union members at the hostel gates, the waiting place, and at the crush. Mine security complained that union men stopped workers from going down.[25]

The policing of the strike, as the above suggests, took place in a number of ways. The most important strategy was to regulate entry and exit to the hostels. In an earlier section I discussed in some detail how the control over entry and exit (or gatekeeping) affected service delivery and hostel maintenance. This involved keeping outsiders (usually management and its representatives) out, and insiders in. Outsiders had to get the permission of the strike committee or union to enter the hostel, and if permission was forthcoming, would be escorted into and out of the hostel. Throughout the strike, all outsiders, be they hostel management staff, mine security, service personnel, even the people who delivered food and other goods to the hostel, were screened and escorted through the hostel. The strike committee was greatly upset when outsiders nevertheless got into

the hostel without their permission, as in the case when 2 members of mine security were found roaming in a West Rand mine hostel. Members of the strike committee held the security men in the union's office, and handed them over to management with the threat that a grievance would be lodged.

The control over the movement of hostel residents, which was the other side of gatekeeping the hostels, was not anywhere as straightforward as keeping outsiders out. The device used, in the first place, to keep track of who belonged to which hostel, and who were outsiders and who were not, was to issue yellow tickets to anyone who left the hostel. The holder of the ticket could easily return to the hostel; those who had no ticket but desired entry had to explain themselves, and often were subjected to a body search. Whether or not this system actually worked day in and day out is not clear from the evidence, and one could indeed wonder aloud about the extent to which such policing of movement was not cause of major traffic congestion in the hostels. What is clear is that by itself the yellow ticket system was not enough of a device to police movement, and had to be supplemented by additional measures.

The problem was one of scale and too many exits and entrances to monitor. To police all of these, efficiently, required a personnel the union either could or would not supply. It was never the union's business during the normal course of industrial life to police hostels, and while of its members easily acquired

the art, they were not schooled nor had the will to play tough policeman with their comrades.

One way of coping with the scale of policing was simply to reduce the number of possible entrances and exits to and from hostels.[26] At the West Rand mine, the union tried to reduce the number of entrances by locking the gates. For the union, keeping the gates locked was a critical part of its regime, as illustrated by the following two incidents. In the one, a member of the strike committee found a previously locked gate unlocked, and asked mine security to lock it. Apparently, the union member was upset about the unlocked gate, and concerned about the fate of the unauthorised people within the hostel. Management claimed that no one was available to lock the gate, whereupon the strike committee member took it upon himself to go to the hostel, fetched a device and locked the gate. At another occasion a member of the union found a gate unlocked, and used wire to barricade it. He returned an hour later to find it broken open once again, wired it up and reported the incident to the chairman of the strike committee.

Of course, the locking of the gates did not go unchallenged by management, who considered these contrary to mine policy and practice. On this basis many a gate was unlocked by mine security; at one hostel (West Rand mine), for example, members of management claimed that union members had locked the gate with two locks and a chain. These were immediately removed by the

But the main area of control was the hostel, and on the rare occasion recourse to the final sanction was used to discipline the work force. With regards to unwelcome guests in the hostels, some were readily thrown out; "NUM apprehended a ... worker in the hostel ... and then chased him out of the hostel." At another occasion, "strike committee brought three trespassers into the office, informed me and kicked them out of the hostel." There were rumours of alleged physical assault, as in one reported incident when "seven union shaft stewards assaulted a person in front of the gate, below the administration offices." In another case, a man was found "tied by the wrists with wire, and sitting on a bench between 3 union members at the main gate." How widespread these activities were is not clear from the available evidence, nor is the culpability of the union in any of these a straightforward matter.[27] In many cases of physical assault, individual workers took it upon themselves to mete out punishment; in other cases, the indifference of the union to acts of physical violence could perhaps be interpreted as license to proceed with behaviours the union could not defend publicly, but from which it did not decisively distance itself.

And it would indeed be false to suggest that the union promoted unrestrained violence, as is sometimes alleged. At the Far West mine, were it not for the union's intervention, the hostel manager could have lost his life. He reported to security that (unknown) individuals wanted to take him out of his office

to kill him, but that members of the union saved him. When it came to other forms of violence, the union also sought justice rather than partisan advantage and co-operated with mine security and the South African Police in a number of cases. In one case, three men were arrested by members of the strike committee at one hostel for raping a black woman. The committee handed the men over to mine security, who passed them on the South African Police. In other (lesser) cases, a man was caught with dagga (marijuana), and he appealed to the union for assistance. They were unsympathetic: "He had asked for help from the NUM but had been told he knew he was in the wrong, and shouldn't have tried to bring it into the hostel." In another episode the strike committee picked up two vagrants, and they were handed over to the South African Police.

Co-operation with mine security and the police should not be taken as collaboration, for the reasons suggested above, but also because the general tone of the relationship between the parties was hostile. And often it was petty and vindictive. In one example, the strike committee refused members of mine security access to the hostel's toilets, and they had to go to great lengths to relieve themselves. The security men told the strike committee member "that they only wanted to go to the toilet and he told them to go 'panzi'." "We don't know where that is," noted the informant.

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Contested Terrain

Towards the end of August, the strike month, a great deal of confusion reigned in the hostels. An increasing number of workers wanted to return to work. They were encouraged by management, but the union did not take kindly to a premature ending of the strike. The Anglo American Corporation, the mining house which took the lead in resolving the strike, first used a lock-out then dismissed workers en masse at some of its mines, in order to force the union back to the bargaining table. In this it succeeded, for the union returned to the bargaining table, and accepted the same wage offer it had refused at the beginning of July. The union's lawyers protested that the mass dismissals were an unfair labour practice, as the pretext for the lockout was subject to dispute. Later, many of the dismissed workers were reinstated as in an out of court settlement between the parties.

At one of the larger Far West Rand mines, and presumably at other mines affected by the strike, the residents were divided into essentially two groups before the mass dismissals came into effect. One group wanted an early return to work; having received warning of possible mass dismissals, these workers feared that they might lose their jobs, a fate which indeed befell many of them. As soon as the opportunity availed itself, these workers went underground. For example, on August 26 1987,

having experienced an unencumbered passage to the mine shaft, "large numbers of black workers consisting of dayshift, night-shift and afternoon shift, entered the crush, reporting for duty." In other cases, groups of returning workers were given security protection by management, on their way to work. In one episode, returning workers were escorted by security and their Casspir to the mine shaft. In another episode, workers were escorted to the crush by a Rhino, another security vehicle.

The other group of workers, the union stalwarts, saw the early return to work as a betrayal of a three-week long struggle. This group tried to frustrate as best possible management's efforts at persuading others to return to work; they tried to prevent workers from leaving the hostel, they kept the gates locked, the changehouses shut. But it was too late. Once the mass dismissals came into effect, the union lost the battle, and in the eyes of the workforce the union's powerlessness in the face of a corporate determination to force a resolution was clearly manifest. The union tried hard to participate in and monitor the pay-outs after the dismissals, but even here corporate management refused to consider the union's proposals regarding procedures for pay-outs.

At the hostels, the union quickly lost ground to management.[28] At the West Rand mine, a manager took back one hostel escorted by mine security and a Casspir. At a second hostel, the kitchens were now run by security. Mine security and six so-

called rescue vehicles took back a third hostel.[29] Hostel residents were told over the public address system that security had taken over, and that people were to stay in their rooms and wait for the shift to be called. By the end of August, the hostel governance was back in the hands of management.

As for the workers dismissed, they were packed off home. Those dismissed but remaining in the hostels were told that they had to leave. In one case, on 29 August 1987, mine security was asked by the hostel manager to perform a room to room search, to determine whether the workers were to be removed from the premises or not. Generally, dismissed workers were thrown out of the hostels. They were not given leave or re-engagement certificates. Particularly targeted were the so-called "trouble-makers", those presumably most active in union business. In one case a team leader identified one of the biggest instigators during the strike; and on the basis of this information, security moved into the hostel to get the instigator's clothes, whereafter he was gotten rid of too. Management went to great lengths to ensure that those who were in the hostels were not dismissed workers; that dismissed workers were packed off home, with little to no chance of re-employment; and that identifiable union activists were among those dismissed. How general these strategies were is not clear from the available evidence. In the instances cited here, they were used with impunity.

The hostels would never be the same institutions again.

Despite the fact that management regained formal control over their functioning, the mining industry entered an era where its institutions became contested terrain. A total institution, used by management as an instrument of control and repression in the past, became in the era of black unionization an arena where the competing power of workers and management played out its logic in the institutional setting of gold mining.

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Notes

1. Francis Wilson, Labour in the South African Gold Mines 1911-1969, (London: Cambridge University Press, 1972) p.57.

2. Wilson, Labour in the South African Gold Mines; Francis Wilson, Migrant Labour, (Johannesburg: Sprocas, 1974); Frederick A. Johnstone, Class, Race and Gold: A Study of Class Relations and Racial Discrimination in South Africa, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1976); Eddie Webster (ed.), Essays in Southern African Labour History, (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1978); Merle Lipton, "Men of Two Worlds," Optima 29 nos. 2/3, 1980.

3. Lipton, "Men of Two Worlds"; pp.95, 113-18.

4. Charles van Onselen, Chibaro: African Mine Labour in Southern Rhodesia 1900-1933, (London: Pluto Press, 1976) pp.136-8.

5. Wilson, Labour in the South African Gold Mines; p.57.

6. T. Dunbar Moodie, "The Moral Economy of the Black Miners' Strike of 1946," Journal of Southern African Studies, 13 no.1 pp.29-30.

7. Johnstone, Class, Race and Gold; p.169.

8. See Johnstone, Class, Race and Gold; p.169.

9. Proceedings, Arbitration, National Union of Mineworkers and Anglo American Corporation, 14/15 March 1988, Johannesburg, PT/201/54. These contain hearsay and written evidence led at the arbitration proceedings between the National Union of Mineworkers and the Anglo American Corporation, over the fairness of the mass dismissals at Vaals Reefs, Western Deep Levels and Free State Consolidated mines at the end of the August 1987 strike.

10. Arbitration, PT/202/89, PT/202/101, PT/202/107, PT/202/108, Weekly Mail 3-9 April 1987 pp.1-2, Star 4 April 1987. In April 1987 black miners moved their wives into the hostels, but discovered that they were neither welcome nor safe. See Business Day 8 April 1987.

11. M.C. Ramaphosa, National of Mineworkers, letter to the General Manager, Chamber of Mines of South Africa, 6 August 1987.

12. See Arbitration, PT/202/118.

13. See van Onselen, Chibaro; p.151.

14. M.C. Ramaphosa, General Secretary, National Union of Mineworkers, to General Manager, Chamber of Mines, 6 August 1987.

15. Arbitration, PT/201/55.

16. General Manager, Chamber of Mines, letter to General Secretary, National Union of Mineworkers. 7 August 1987.

17. Arbitration, PT/203/136.

18. Arbitration, PT/203/149.

19. For an account of the strike at a Goldfields mine, which illustrates the power of managerial and security control at a mine where the NUM is weakly represented, see Mzimkulu Malunga, "My Life as a Miner: Part IV," Weekly Mail August 19 to 25 1988, pp.10-11. See also Arbitration, PT/202/89. Goldfields were also accused earlier of tolerating the use of torture against miners. See Weekly Mail 13-19 February 1987 pp.1-2, and Goldfiels' response, in Business Day 16 February 1987.

20. Arbitration, PT/203/125.

21. Arbitration, PT/203/133.

22. Arbitration, PT/203/140.

23. See Mancur Olson, The Logic of Collective Behaviour: Public Goods and the Theory of Groups, (Cambrdige: Harvard University Press, 1971) pp.70-71.

24. A term used also by Coletane Markham and Monyaola Mothibeli, "The 1987 Mineworkers Strike." (Unpublished paper, Sociology of Work Programme Workshop, University of the Witwatersrand, October 1987) p.5.

25. Arbitration, PT/203/124-5.

26. Arbitration, PT/203/131.

27. See J.K. McNamara, "Inter-group violence among black employees on South African gold mines." South African Sociological Review, 1 no.1, October 1988, 31-33.

28. Arbitration, PT/201/73.

29. Arbitration, PT/203/125.