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UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND

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TITLE: "We Must Speak for Ourselves": The Rise and Fall of a Public Sphere on the South African Gold Mines, 1920--1931

BY: **Keith Breckenridge**

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"We Must Speak for Ourselves": The Rise and Fall of a Public Sphere on the South African Gold Mines, 1920--1931

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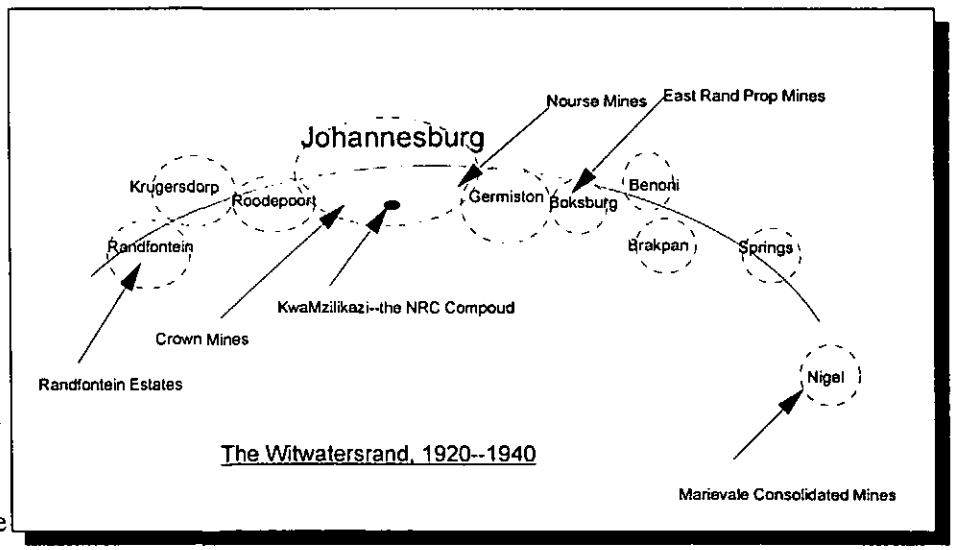
University of Natal, Durban.

8 April, 1996.

On the evening of March 17, 1940, about 600 workers gathered together inside the Marievale Consolidated Compound, on the far south-eastern tip of the Witwatersrand gold-mining crescent. The workers demanded that the gates of the compound be opened, as they intended to march the forty miles to Johannesburg to present their grievances to Henry Taberer at KwaMzilikazi, the headquarters of the Native Recruiting Corporation. At about 8 pm, thirty-five policemen arrived from the nearby towns of Nigel, Springs and Brakpan, and demanded to know what was troubling the workers. After considerable discussion, it was resolved that the Marievale mine had run out of the regulation shift tickets normally used to record the labor of African workers, and that older tickets were being used in their place. These tickets were printed with the higher wage rates received by workers during the early development of the mine: the mine officials had simply crossed out the 2 shillings and six-pence rates and stamped the standard minimum of 2s onto each slip of paper. The workers were suspicious about this conspicuous reduction of wage rates, and they argued that they were due the 2/6 established by the Native Recruiting Corporation.

Having discovered their grievances, the captain in charge of the police advised the workers to return to their rooms, and promised that their complaint would be investigated by the proper officials. The workers, however, "adopted a very truculent attitude by refusing to return to their rooms and insisted in demanding that the gate of the Compound be opened for them". The police then summoned a Native Affairs Department official from Nigel who again assured the workers that their complaints would be investigated and asked them to return to their rooms. The assembly refused. They informed the police and officials that "too many complaints have not received proper attention in the past".[1] The NAD official then consulted his superior in Johannesburg, and was instructed to command the workers to return to their rooms and assure them that their demands would be investigated in the morning.

Again, the workers declined and they repeated their demand to be allowed to march to Johannesburg. The captain then announced to the gathering that if they failed to return to their rooms, the police would use force to disperse them. For the fourth time the workers refused to move, and they remained seated in a group in the center of the compound. The police waited for fifteen minutes, and then baton-charged the assembly, driving the workers into their rooms. The policemen remained in the compound until 4 am, when the day shift went underground without incident.[2]



This episode--on the furthest periphery of the Witwatersrand--speaks volumes about the politics of the gold mines. It is, for instance, highly revealing of the central role played by the South African Police in the maintenance of order in the mine compounds by the second world war. But it also presents an intriguing problem. Why were the workers of the Marievale determined to

[1] CAD NTS 7675, 102/333(1) Witwatersrand Mines Native Unrest General File, 1938--47, Hepburn, T. District Commandant, SAP, Boksburg District to Deputy Commissioner, Witwatersrand Division, SAP, 20 March, 1940.

[2] CAD NTS 7675, 102/333(1) Witwatersrand Mines Native Unrest General File, 1938--47, Hepburn, T. District Commandant, SAP, Boksburg District to Deputy Commissioner, Witwatersrand Division, SAP, 20 March, 1940.

march--on a route that would take them through all the towns and suburbs of the east Rand--to the WNLA compound in downtown Johannesburg? And why did they want to present their demands to Taberer? These two questions become all the more perplexing in the light of a fact that seems to have escaped the police officials who reported the incident: Henry Taberer had been dead for eight years.

The Public Sphere

In the twenty years that preceded the protests at the Marievale compound, a political transformation took place in South Africa. This chapter will follow one piece of it. In order to understand this change it is necessary for us to control one of the most powerful urges of the radical historiography: the desire to recover continuities between the system of Apartheid and the social order, often called segregation, that preceded it. The impulse to push back the roots of Apartheid ever further into the past has blinded us to the political significance of both the widespread popular protest that took place in the 1910s and 1920s, and the extraordinary steps implemented by the state after 1927 to control these activities.

The central argument of this paper is this: in the years after 1910 something recognizably similar to Habermas' public sphere emerged amongst the African population in South Africa. It was during this period that African men from across the vast distances of the subcontinent, and even more powerful linguistic and ethnic differences, addressed each other as confederates and equals for the first time. The two pillars of this southern African public stood on uneven class foundations. The interconnected newspapers of the Black Press, including--to mention only the most famous--*Abantu Batho, Imvo Zabantsundu, Ilanga Lase Natal* and *Umteteli wa Bantu*, addressed, and defined, the predominantly clerical elite.[3] But this decade also witnessed the proliferation of mass political meetings involving the working class on the mines and towns, in the labour reserves, and on the white farms of the *Platteland.* The peculiar association of these institutions gave the public sphere that emerged in southern Africa in the 1920s a racial and nationalist identity that separate it from both the bourgeois public of the 18th century described by Habermas and Warner, Thompson's 18th century working class crowds, or Jacksonian party politics.[4]

But the most important feature--of the mass working class assemblies and the printed media--was the form of discourse that emerged from these institutions. Both public meetings and the press placed primary emphasis upon the levelling force of political speech, logical argument and the real power of debate. "In this public sphere", as Calhoun has observed for the European case, "practical reason was institutionalized through norms of reasoned discourse in which arguments, not statuses or traditions were to be decisive".[5] Popular politics in the 1920s was organized and mobilized by a self-consciously rational, critical discourse.

There were other important continuities. Like the 18th century European public sphere, the force driving the new form of politics in southern Africa was an all-embracing capitalist economy. What Eley has described as a "causal homology between culture and economics" can be identified very clearly in southern Africa in the 1920s.[6] For the first time, people from across the subcontinent

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[3] While each of these papers had relatively small circulations and limited geographical distributions, they tended, as Switzer has documented, to cite each other prolifically. (The only study we have thus far is Switzer's analysis of *Imvo*, which suggests subscription figures of between 1,000 and 2,000 in the 1920s). Les Switzer, "The Ambiguities of Protest in South Africa: Rural Politics and the Press during the 1920s." International Journal of African Historical Studies (1990, 23:1) 96, 108.

[4] Jurgen Habermas The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Soceity (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 1989). Michael Warner Letters of the Republic: Publication and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth Century America (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990). Edward Thompson, "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century." *Past and Present* (1971, 50). Mary Ryan "Gender and Public Access: Women's Politics in Nineteenth-Century America", Habermas and the Public Sphere, ed. Craig Calhoun (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992) 267-273.

[5] Craig Chalhoun "Introduction: Habermas and the Public Sphere" Habermas and the Public Sphere, ed. Craig Calhoun (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT, 1992) 2.

[6] Geoff Eley, "Nations, Publics and Political Cultures: Placing Habermas in the Nineteenth Century", Habermas and the Public Sphere, ed. Craig Calhoun (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992) 29.

were subject to a consistent capitalist trinity: a monetized economy based on the circulation of gold coins, the ubiquitous sale and consumption of commodities, and the increasing necessity of waged migrant labour. The South African public in the 1920s was also inherently, almost exclusively, male. (This point is especially true of the migrant workers' assemblies, and stands in contrast to the local urban protests of the 1940s).

It was the gold mining industry around which all of these elements turned. By the end of the 1920s, over 300,000 workers from across the subcontinent were housed in concentrated compounds from Randfontein to Springs. The number of adult males who had substantial experience of waged work on the gold mines was certainly double that figure. The mines also provided the single most important source of employment for literate Africans. It was Henry Taberer, the man who gave his isiXhosa epithet "Teba" to the whole apparatus of mine recruitment, who staged many of the public meetings of migrant workers on the Rand, and throughout the countryside. Finally, this paper will suggest that the distinctive pattern of protest meetings that exploded across South Africa with the expansion of the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union of Africa (ICU) in 1925, was explicitly modelled on Taberer's public recruitment meetings.

This paper is also a study of Taberer's work; it forms a piece of the growing literature that tries to make sense of the officials who mobilized African institutions in the defense of colonial authority. Taberer, like Shepstone and Marwick, is a remarkable figure; his subtlety, and cunning, is not easily captured by the method suggested by the literature on the invention of tradition. Unlike, for example, the British Raj's spectacular effort symbolically to incorporate the indigenous Indian aristocracy, South African "Native Experts"--with the possible, incongruous, exception of Verwoerd--were always working from the margins of the white hierarchies of capital and the state. Taberer's power, like Shepstone's before him, was substantially a product of the African constituency he claimed to control. It is certainly the argument of this study that Taberer was trying to shape a political process that far exceeded his reach, and that he was ultimately defeated by the combined force of popular protest amongst the workers and disciplinary reaction amongst the minelords and the state.[7]

This study proposes a set of revisions to both the southern African historiography, and the broader theoretical literature prompted by Habermas' study of the public sphere. To begin with the obvious: there are, as Chakrabarty has pointed out, precious few analyses of non-western publics.[8] Even the cursory evidence presented here, suggests that Habermas' emphasis on the European bourgeois characteristics of the realm of rational-critical discourse may be misplaced. Legal discourse amongst Africans in southern Africa in the early part of the century seems to have had many of the discursive characteristics that emerged in Europe after the capitalist transformation. The ethnographic literature on the law and legal processes inside South Africa is, with the exception of Schapera's study of Tswana-speakers, comparatively thin, but a number of socio-cultural features of the law are, nonetheless, unmistakable.[9] All the studies of rural legal proceedings in the 1920s and 1930s stressed the customary openness of the law, and the importance of unrestrained speech. It is also clear that the law formed an integral part of the social identity of adult men in southern Africa.[10]

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[7] Bernard S. Cohen "Representing Authority in Victorian India", The Invention of Tradition Edited by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983) 165-210. Carolyn Hamilton. "Authoring Shaka: Models, Metaphors and Historiography" (PhD Dissertation, Johns Hopkins University, 1993) 63-70, 208-288.

[8] Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History: Who Speaks for "Indian" Pasts?" Representations 37 (Winter 1992), 1-26.

[9] Isaac Schapera A Handbook of Tswana Law and Custom, (London: Oxford University Press for IAI, 1938).

[10] Ashton, MS. notes cited in Isaac Schapera,"Law and Justice" The Bantu-speaking Tribes of South Africa ed. Isaac Schapera (London: Routledge, 1937) 215. Monica Hunter Reaction to Conquest: Effects of Contact with Europeans on the Pondo of South Africa (Londond: Oxford University Press for IAI, 1961), 415. The Comaroffs have suggested that a fundamental paradox of kinship relations lay at the heart of Tswana-speakers enthusiasm for the law: "Insofar as existing marriage arrangements yielded an ambiguous, contradictory field of relations, they threw the onus on men (and by extension on their households) for building

The intellectual historiography of black people in southern Africa is still at a very early stage, but this paper at least problematizes the common understanding of the determining relationship between the 18th century European Enlightenment and the foundations of public reason in southern Africa, and perhaps elsewhere.

But this study also proposes a reassessment of the epoch that has come to be known as the "segregationist" period in South African historiography. The combined effects of the mass political discourse on the mines, the rambunctious "rural populism" that Beinart and Bundy have explored, and the explosive discursive activities of the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union (ICU), were to expand and redefine the meaning of politics for black South Africans in the 1920s.[11] And is it simply out of nostalgia that we should notice this point. This paper and the larger research of which it forms a part, argues that the assault on African rights of assembly, and citizenship, was at the heart of the making of the Apartheid state; the decline of the liberal state was a necessary condition for the implementation of the sophisticated mechanisms of documentary surveillance and police control that were implemented on the Witwatersrand after the Depression. By the end of the 1920s, a fully fledged ideology of segregation sought to deflect black workers' demands for a responsive state, and dismantle the audience of the public sphere along rigidly racist lines.

Both the rise and fall of the African public sphere in the 1920s were centered on the gold mines of the Witwatersrand. Of course, the struggle between black workers and white employers was much larger than the gold mines. The struggle between the ICU and white farmers in the countryside has been widely documented. But in this period, the political and economic power of the Chamber of Mines, and even the individual constituent mining houses, towered over their industrial and agricultural peers. In order to trace the development of a form of popular politics that privileged speech *per se*, and the efforts of the minelords and the state to first control and then dismantle this African public sphere, we must return to the mines.

The 1920 Strike

On Tuesday, February 17, 1920 the 2,000 workers in the Cason compound at the massive ERPM complex came out on strike. Within days, workers struck on every major mine and thirty-one compounds across the reef. "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 25,561 on the seventh".[12] The ten days that followed--before the workers in the six compounds at Randfontein Central on the western end of the Rand had finally agreed to return to work--saw one of the most sustained and complex worker protests in South African history.

The strike began in the abutting compounds of the mines in the Germiston area. Like a fire, it spread quickly amongst the neighboring compounds at ERPM and across the central Witwatersrand. Within forty-eight hours, the workers on most of the mines to the immediate south of the city of Johannesburg--from Nourse Mines to Consolidated Main Reef--refused to go underground. And from there it leapt the Roodepoort and Brakpan gaps to the mines on the far east and west edges of the Main Reef.[13]

But, unlike a fire, the strike did not burn itself out. Workers on the East Rand, the Johannesburg district and far western areas like Randfontein returned to work under very different circumstances. For the first four days of the strike there were so few police available that managers

networks of linkages and thereby constructing their social identities". Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991) 139.

[11] William Beinart and Colin Bundy Hidden Struggles in Rural South Africa: Politics and Popular Movements in the Transkei and Eastern Cape, 1890--1930 (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1987) 6-10. Helen Bradford. A Taste of Freedom: The ICU in Rural South Africa, 1924-1930 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987) 123-127.

[12] Philip Bonner, "The 1920 Black Mineworkers' Strike: a preliminary account", Labour, Townships and Protest: Studies in the Social History of the Witwatersrand, ed. Belinda Bozzoli (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1979) 274.

[13] Bonner, "The 1920 Black Mineworkers' Strike", 274. TAD GNLB 312, 125/19/48 History of Strike, February 1920, "Short Statement of Causes and Events of Native Strike: February 1920", 1 March, 1920.

had little choice but to negotiate with workers. After midnight on Saturday, February 20, a hundred members of the South African Mounted Rifles arrived in Germiston from Pretoria. By that stage the strike at ERPM was all but resolved; the mines in the central district would bear the brunt of the state's renewed confidence. Ironically, the spectacular violence of the police attacks on the Village Deep, Crown Mines and Langlaagte Compounds seems to have cooled the state's enthusiasm for confrontation, and the workers on the mines in Roodepoort and Randfontein were able to win important concessions before returning to work.

There were many grievances expressed during the strike, but the issue that concerned all the workers was an increase in wages. Like much of the rest of the world, South Africa underwent an unprecedented inflationary crisis after 1917 and the protests, whether as formal demands for increased wages or as boycotts of the stores adjacent to the mines, were intended to restore the value of labor. There were other issues. The return of white workers from the front, and the increasingly rigid application of the color bar, served to exacerbate the inflationary assault on workers' wages. The workers at Anglo-American's brand new Springs Mine asked management to give the white workers a week's holiday during which they would run the mine themselves: they also promised to double production in that period. [14]

Much of this is now well known.[15] But we would miss the significance of the strike if we were to leave it there. For the 1920 strike also marked the beginning of a particular form of cultural politics on the South African gold mines; a form that survived only until the end of the decade. The strike both revealed and defined a new political dramaturgy in the compounds. In this political theater both the workers and the Native Recruiting Corporation conspired to give Henry Taberer the *lead role.*

Three months before the strike, the Secretary of Native Affairs was astonished to learn that a group of "some hundreds" of workers from the Rose Deep Compound had marched the seven miles from their compound to KwaMzilikazi on Eloff Street to demand on audience with Taberer. At 8.30 pm, after their own meeting had concluded, a group of 220 workers departed for the WNLA compound. The next morning a smaller group of about 100 also left to join their comrades. On Friday November 7, after marching through the eastern suburbs the combined assembly was met by the police and escorted to Eloff Street, where they were addressed by the Director of Native Labour, S. M. Pritchard, and by Taberer. The workers were told that they had broken the law and should return to work, but only after they had appointed representatives to discuss their grievances with Taberer. As it had started to rain, the recruiters offered the workers free train passage back to their compounds. And the following Monday, Taberer went out to the mine to address the workers and "go into all complaints". He was warned by the representatives to wait until all the workers had come off shift or "there might be blood-shed and the White Man's blood might get mixed with the Black Man's". The result of this meeting was the reinstatement of a dismissed compound policeman who had "been particularly active in representing the alleged grievances of the natives". For the Secretary of Native Affairs, the workers' complaints were "trivial as compared with the emphasis of representation", and he suggested that sinister influences might be at work. But no evidence of outside interference was forthcoming, and Pritchard could only caution the workers "that their method of attempting to ventilate their grievances by marching to Johannesburg" was likely to bring them into conflict with the police and the white citizenry.[16]

The warnings had little effect. Three weeks later a similar group from the adjacent Simmer & Jack mine left their compound after dark and began to march down Main Reef road towards KwaMzilikazi. Three hundred workers, armed with sticks & pick handles, whose "screaming could be heard distinctly over a mile away", were stopped by the Police on Main Reef Road at the Cleveland Station.[17] After Taberer had addressed them, the workers returned quietly to their

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[14] Bonner, "The 1920 Black Mineworkers' Strike", 281-2.

[15] Reader's Digest Illustrated History of South Africa--The Real Story (Reader's Digest: Cape Town, 1992) 311.

[16] TAD GNLB 311, 125/19/48 Natives on Rose Deep and Simmer & Jack march into Town, 24 November 1919, SNA to DNL, 21 November, 1919. TAD GNLB 312, 125/19/48 History of Strike, February 1920, Fitzgerald to DNL, 10 March, 1920.

compound. The following day the workers presented perennial demands about the strength of the compound beer, the meat ration, the use of the sjambok in the Compound, non-marking of tickets underground, and the issuing of drill-bits. The only significant result of this exchange was a change in the form of the meat ration; in every other respect the complaints were referred to the mine management for investigation.

There is good reason to believe that these grievances were harnessed to more dramatic political developments in the compounds. On December 7, David Nkosi, a Mozambican migrant in the Simmer & Jack compound sent a letter to his compatriots on the coal mines in Witbank. "To all the Witbank people", he wrote, "we inform you about the matter we have started." His letter suggests that the Mozambican workers at Simmer & Jack were furious about the combined depredations of Mozambican officials and local shop-keepers.

> We talk about the bad treatment of the East Coast people in Portuguese territory. We had a meeting and went to the Compound Manager and we asked him to call the Portuguese Curator to come to the Compound he agreed and the Curator came to the Compound. We complained about our grievances, about the £1 they take from us in Johannesburg and about the money that is taken from us at the frontier on account of goods we bring in the Transvaal. We pay twice, once here, and once at the frontier. He tried to satisfy us by telling us that it was on account of us staying too long in Transvaal that the £1 was taken. We answered him saying we are not sent here but come on account of the difficulties at home. If we have not settled our difficulty what use is to go home?

The encounter between the Simmer & Jack workers and the Portuguese Curator took the form of a highly structured argument. And it is obvious from Nkosi's letter that they believed that logic was on their side. But the letter also reveals the political significance of speech itself.

> You people at Witbank must do the same, praying God to help you. These are the words we have given you. It is very good that all the Mines must do the same. Wake up the people, we must speak for ourselves without talking we will never get anything from the white people. Wake up do not be frightened let all the heathens come together and call the Portuguese and he must answer us after the meeting. You know that the matter is good when there are a lot of people talking about it you must go round and spread the news. We have also sent the message to Randfontein we have started here and called the white man, you must do the same.[18]

The significance of this letter can hardly be overemphasized. In its tone, imagery and practice it suggests that officials may well have been correct when they sought to blame the Church Schools for the disorder in the compound, although there is, as yet, very little evidence on this. It also reveals that the widespread protest manifested in the 1920 strike was not an automatic response, but the result of concerted political action. But the letter also suggests that the mineworkers were acutely aware of the political significance of silence, and that they were determined to be heard. Finally, Nkosi advocated the power of argument--what Habermas has called rational critical discourse--to force a response from white officials. And, if their grievances were ignored workers, had the option of abandoning the compound and marching to KwaMzilikazi.[19]

On January 5, to the consternation of the Native Affairs Department and the Native Recruiting Corporation, the workers at another of the Germiston mines, Knight Central, abandoned their compound and began to march to Johannesburg. The march was a rhetorical gambit. On two previous occasions they had placed demands before the compound officials--with no success. Now they refused to even state their grievances to the compound officials, and demanded that Taberer be summoned to hear them. To underscore their demand they began to march to KwaMzilikazi, and

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[17] TAD GNLB 311, 125/19/48 Natives on Rose Deep and Simmer & Jack march into Town, 24/11/1919, Connellan to Inspector, Eastern Area, 25 November, 1919.

[18] CAD JUS 268, 3/127/20 Industrial Unrest Natives 1920: Native Congress Reports on Activities, Nkosi, 7 December, 1919.

[19] TAD GNLB 312, 125/19/48 History of Strike, February 1920, Fitzgerald to Director of Native Labour, 10 March, 1920.

although they were forced to return to the compound by the Germiston mounted police, the compound manager assured them that Taberer "would come and enquire" the following day.[20]

By this time the pilgrimages to KwaMzilikazi were proving to be more than an embarrassment to Taberer and the Native Recruiting Corporation. They threatened to undermine completely the authority of compound managers, and posed extraordinary problems for the small urban police force scattered along the Witwatersrand. Taberer responded accordingly. He remonstrated that the workers "had no right to ask him to come out, or to attempt to march to Johannesburg". He stressed that they were obliged to place their grievances before the compound manager, or, if necessary, the mine manager. He declared that "they had not gone the right way to enlist sympathy and a hearing", and that he would not listen to them. He waved off those who attempted to explain that their complaints had gone unanswered, and when a thunderstorm drenched the gathering, the silenced workers returned to their rooms. But once Taberer had left, the compound manager went to considerable lengths to explain the benefits of the five shilling monthly increase that the N. R. C. had just introduced in an attempt to quieten the protests in the compounds.[21]

Taberer's rebuttal, and the pre-emptive wage increase, did not quench the protests in the compounds. They simply deflected protests back on to the mine stores that had been the focus of the workers' anger for over a year. On February 11, the police arrested a worker from the Simmer & Jack compound for organizing the picket of the local mine stores. That evening, workers at Simmer & Jack once again abandoned their compound and began the march to KwaMzilikazi. They were met by the Germiston mounted police, who escorted them back to their compound and later in the evening baton-charged the workers to force them to return to their rooms. Both the picket-organizer and David Nkosi were arrested under the ambiguous 'law and order' provisions of the Native Labour Regulation Act. Nkosi was arrested for writing the letter to the Mozambican workers in Witbank which had fallen into the hands of the Portuguese Curator. But while the police and the management of the Simmer & Jack may have imagined that they had put a firm stop to the disorder in the compound, these events marked the beginning of an explosion of protest across the Reef.[22]

By Tuesday, February 17, workers' assemblies in the Knights Deep West Compound were refusing to work and were demanding that Taberer address their demands for wage increases. At the New Heriot Mine Taberer was forced to climb the sand dump to address a meeting of workers; he managed to persuade them to return to work after offering them the five shilling increase. By the next day Taberer was barely able to keep track of the strike meetings being called across the Witwatersrand. And the protest had already taken hold on the massive five compound complex of the East Rand Proprietary Mines.

The strike at the Cason compound began on February 17. It was precipitated by the arrest, under Section 15 of the NLRA, of two workers who had been "inciting" workers in the compound to strike. Later in the day the local Inspector from the Native Affairs Department held a meeting at which workers presented demands that included the release of the two workers and a larger than five shilling increase in wages. The only matter resolved was that the mine would stamp workers rates of pay on their shift tickets, but no other issues were settled. The workers appointed a delegation to interview the Mine Manager and asked for an increase of ten shillings a day. The workers "were distinctly told that the mine could not grant any further increase", and they resolved not to go underground the following day.[23] And they set about to persuade the other workers to strike.

Matthew Butelezi, one of the workers from the Comet compound, wrote to *Abantu Batho* about the strike.[24] "The Cason started on Tuesday", he wrote, "When we went out from underground

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[20] TAD GNLB 312, 125/19/48 History of Strike, February 1920, Fitzgerald to Director of Native Labour, 10 March 1920. Rand Daily Mail, 6 January, 1920. Rand Daily Mail, 7 January, 1920.

[21] Rand Daily Mail, 7 January, 1920.

[22] CAD JUS 268, 3/127/20 Industrial Unrest Natives 1920: Native Congress Reports on Activities, Adkins to District Commandant, SAP, 14 February, 1920

[23] TAD GNLB 312, 125/19/48 History of Strike, February 1920, Inspector, NAD, Boksburg to DNL, 15 March, 1920.

[24] Abantu Batho, 18 March, 1920.

we met the boys from the New Comet outside the Compound." And again he stressed the discursive practices at the center of the strike:

> The white man in charge of the E. R. P. Mines came and he said "What is it? What do you want to do here?" The boys said "We want to speak for ourselves, we did not call you." He said, "No, I want to advise you, if you want to discuss, do not discuss outside the compound because the Corporation will arrest you. I leave you." We kept discussing at that same spot. On Wednesday we stayed and did not go underground.

The workers at the Comet and Cason were joined by the Angelo and Driefontein compounds. "On Thursday", he noted, "the Police Force came and we were instructed not to leave the Compound, then on Friday a white man by the name of "Vulindlela" (Open the thoroughfare) arrived, we tried to listen". Butelezi's account suggests that officials also sought to highlight the rhetorical distinction between themselves and the police. He reported Vulindlela's speech:

> Tomorrow, you must go to work. I am sent by the Government to tell you that this is the last day. I say you must go underground to-morrow. If you do not go down the police will have to talk to you.

And he recounted the events of the morning of Saturday February 21 when the troops of the SAMR and the police sought to provide escort for those who wanted to work.

> We said "alright, we won't go", consequently, the lads, on the 21st at 4 o'clock in the morning went out and sat down on the ground in an open place. 5 o'clock struck, which never fails. The white police arrived and went in. Twelve went into the big yard and 12 more into another one. It looked as though they would charge and yet not. Still, they were persuading.

It is remarkable that even this encounter with the police is presented as a discursive exchange. Later, the police did manage to convince a group of about 1,000 workers to go on shift but as they were waiting to go underground at the Comet shaft-head the workers changed their minds and returned to the compound. Butelezi described the episode:

> Some consented and went to deceive those of the Swazi tribe. When the whole compound was clad ready to go down underground, just when they reached the shaft they refused to go down. They came back again.

But the strike at ERPM. came to a head as the morning wore on. Taberer arrived at the mine and visited each of the compounds in the company of the District Commandant. These meetings, and Taberer's refusal to grant an additional increase, marked a rhetorical rupture for the workers.

> Mr Taberer arrived at 10 o'clock. Mr Taberer said, the money you demand you will not get, not more than 2 pence that's what you want. We, then, felt ourselves powerless. Therefore, we, very much ask for the Congress Assistance.

But intervention from the Transvaal Native Congress was not forthcoming, and on Monday, February 23, the workers of all four compounds at ERPM returned to work. But even at this point they did not abandon the rhetorical conflict; they insisted that the workers arrested at the start of the strike should be released, and the charges filed against them, dropped.

> ... at Cason two were convicted namely Skobho and Mubi, they are accused for preaching bad doctrine amongst natives. The natives are not agreeable, they say you had better discharge those people, then we shall listen to what you say, it is said they will be discharged.

And Butelezi was right. Once the strike was over the Chief Compound Manager withdrew disorder charges against them and they returned to the compound.

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although they were forced to return to the compound by the Germiston mounted police, the compound manager assured them that Taberer "would come and enquire" the following day.[20]

By this time the pilgrimages to KwaMzilikazi were proving to be more than an embarrassment to Taberer and the Native Recruiting Corporation. They threatened to undermine completely the authority of compound managers, and posed extraordinary problems for the small urban police force scattered along the Witwatersrand. Taberer responded accordingly. He remonstrated that the workers "had no right to ask him to come out, or to attempt to march to Johannesburg". He stressed that they were obliged to place their grievances before the compound manager, or, if necessary, the mine manager. He declared that "they had not gone the right way to enlist sympathy and a hearing", and that he would not listen to them. He waved off those who attempted to explain that their complaints had gone unanswered, and when a thunderstorm drenched the gathering, the silenced workers returned to their rooms. But once Taberer had left, the compound manager went to considerable lengths to explain the benefits of the five shilling monthly increase that the N. R. C. had just introduced in an attempt to quieten the protests in the compounds.[21]

Taberer's rebuttal, and the pre-emptive wage increase, did not quench the protests in the compounds. They simply deflected protests back on to the mine stores that had been the focus of the workers' anger for over a year. On February 11, the police arrested a worker from the Simmer & Jack compound for organizing the picket of the local mine stores. That evening, workers at Simmer & Jack once again abandoned their compound and began the march to KwaMzilikazi. They were met by the Germiston mounted police, who escorted them back to their compound and later in the evening baton-charged the workers to force them to return to their rooms. Both the picket-organizer and David Nkosi were arrested under the ambiguous 'law and order' provisions of the Native Labour Regulation Act. Nkosi was arrested for writing the letter to the Mozambican workers in Witbank which had fallen into the hands of the Portuguese Curator. But while the police and the management of the Simmer & Jack may have imagined that they had put a firm stop to the disorder in the compound, these events marked the beginning of an explosion of protest across the Reef.[22]

By Tuesday, February 17, workers' assemblies in the Knights Deep West Compound were refusing to work and were demanding that Taberer address their demands for wage increases. At the New Heriot Mine Taberer was forced to climb the sand dump to address a meeting of workers; he managed to persuade them to return to work after offering them the five shilling increase. By the next day Taberer was barely able to keep track of the strike meetings being called across the Witwatersrand. And the protest had already taken hold on the massive five compound complex of the East Rand Proprietary Mines.

The strike at the Cason compound began on February 17. It was precipitated by the arrest, under Section 15 of the NLRA, of two workers who had been "inciting" workers in the compound to strike. Later in the day the local Inspector from the Native Affairs Department held a meeting at which workers presented demands that included the release of the two workers and a larger than five shilling increase in wages. The only matter resolved was that the mine would stamp workers rates of pay on their shift tickets, but no other issues were settled. The workers appointed a delegation to interview the Mine Manager and asked for an increase of ten shillings a day. The workers "were distinctly told that the mine could not grant any further increase", and they resolved not to go underground the following day.[23] And they set about to persuade the other workers to strike.

Matthew Butelezi, one of the workers from the Comet compound, wrote to *Abantu Batho* about the strike.[24] "The Cason started on Tuesday", he wrote, "When we went out from underground

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[20] TAD GNLB 312, 125/19/48 History of Strike, February 1920, Fitzgerald to Director of Native Labour, 10 March 1920. Rand Daily Mail, 6 January, 1920. Rand Daily Mail, 7 January, 1920.

[21] Rand Daily Mail, 7 January, 1920.

[22] CAD JUS 268, 3/127/20 Industrial Unrest Natives 1920: Native Congress Reports on Activities, Adkins to District Commandant, SAP, 14 February, 1920

[23] TAD GNLB 312, 125/19/48 History of Strike, February 1920, Inspector, NAD, Boksburg to DNL, 15 March, 1920.

[24] Abantu Batho, 18 March, 1920.

we met the boys from the New Comet outside the Compound." And again he stressed the discursive practices at the center of the strike:

> The white man in charge of the E. R. P. Mines came and he said "What is it? What do you want to do here?" The boys said "We want to speak for ourselves, we did not call you." He said, "No, I want to advise you, if you want to discuss, do not discuss outside the compound because the Corporation will arrest you. I leave you." We kept discussing at that same spot. On Wednesday we stayed and did not go underground.

The workers at the Comet and Cason were joined by the Angelo and Driefontein compounds. "On Thursday", he noted, "the Police Force came and we were instructed not to leave the Compound, then on Friday a white man by the name of "Vulindlela" (Open the thoroughfare) arrived, we tried to listen". Butelezi's account suggests that officials also sought to highlight the rhetorical distinction between themselves and the police. He reported Vulindlela's speech:

> Tomorrow, you must go to work. I am sent by the Government to tell you that this is the last day. I say you must go underground to-morrow. If you do not go down the police will have to talk to you.

And he recounted the events of the morning of Saturday February 21 when the troops of the SAMR and the police sought to provide escort for those who wanted to work.

> We said "alright, we won't go", consequently, the lads, on the 21st at 4 o'clock in the morning went out and sat down on the ground in an open place. 5 o'clock struck, which never fails. The white police arrived and went in. Twelve went into the big yard and 12 more into another one. It looked as though they would charge and yet not. Still, they were persuading.

It is remarkable that even this encounter with the police is presented as a discursive exchange. Later, the police did manage to convince a group of about 1,000 workers to go on shift but as they were waiting to go underground at the Comet shaft-head the workers changed their minds and returned to the compound. Butelezi described the episode:

> Some consented and went to deceive those of the Swazi tribe. When the whole compound was clad ready to go down underground, just when they reached the shaft they refused to go down. They came back again.

But the strike at ERPM. came to a head as the morning wore on. Taberer arrived at the mine and visited each of the compounds in the company of the District Commandant. These meetings, and Taberer's refusal to grant an additional increase, marked a rhetorical rupture for the workers.

> Mr Taberer arrived at 10 o'clock. Mr Taberer said, the money you demand you will not get, not more than 2 pence that's what you want. We, then, felt ourselves powerless. Therefore, we, very much ask for the Congress Assistance.

But intervention from the Transvaal Native Congress was not forthcoming, and on Monday, February 23, the workers of all four compounds at ERPM returned to work. But even at this point they did not abandon the rhetorical conflict; they insisted that the workers arrested at the start of the strike should be released, and the charges filed against them, dropped.

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Manager of the Randfontein Central agreed to significant wage concessions and to arrange for the release of the arrested workers. It was on the West Rand that the most important wage increases were won by workers. In addition to the five shilling increase that was applied across the industry, unskilled workers at Randfontein and Roodepoort gained increases that ranged from 15 to 60 per cent.[25]

In the central Johannesburg district the strike took a very different form. It was in this district that the bulk of the Witwatersrand police were stationed and most of the S. A. M. R. troops were also allocated to guard the mines amidst the white residents of Johannesburg. Like their comrades at ERPM and Randfontein Central, the workers at Crown Mines--the largest mine on the Witwatersrand--called a meeting on Thursday, February 19, demanding a wage increase, and a reply from management on the upcoming Saturday. When no increase was forthcoming the workers resolved not to work the Monday morning shift. Unlike the workers on the other two mines, the workers on Crown Mines were forced underground at bayonet point by troops of the South African Mounted Rifles. Only a small group of about 200 workers managed to break away and take up position on the dumps. The Johannesburg Inspector later reported to his superiors that "detachments of the S. A. M. Rifles were seen galloping all over the Crown Mines property". Perhaps as a result of the confrontations at Crown Mines, the police faced much more determined resistance from the adjacent compounds at the Consolidated Langlaagte and Village Deep when, two days later, they resolved to "turn out" the workers. The climax of the strike came in the early morning of Wednesday, February 25, when detachments of the SAP and the SAMR attempted to break into the Village Deep Compound. They faced determined and organized resistance from the workers, and they later argued were in fear of losing their lives, when they opened fire on the workers gathered to defend the compound. In this incident alone, eight workers were killed and at least twenty-five seriously injured.[26]

On almost all the mines, management made use of the "disorder" clause of the Native Labour Regulation Act to arrest organizing workers. By the end of the strike, the police had made 463 arrests, almost two-thirds of whom were arrested for refusing to work, and most of the remaining 150 arrests were made under section 15. But as the events at Randfontein and ERPM demonstrated, it was often easier to drop charges than face the hostility of the workers and the difficulty of securing convictions. Many mines, including those on the Far East Rand like Modder B, and New State Areas, faced police violence and those on the central district had to face bayonet wielding troops on horses. It would seem perverse, in the light of this evidence, to argue that the strike was a success. But, as we have seen, on the East and West Rand workers returned to work after management had made significant concessions. And perhaps more importantly, both immediately prior to and during the strike, industry-wide wage concessions were made. It was to be fifty years before increases of the same relative magnitude were to be seen on the mines again.

In the course of the strike two different wage concessions were won by the workers. The maximum average--which held the wages of all African workers to an agreed minimum--was raised from two shillings per shift to two shillings and three pence. The wages of skilled African workers received a more substantial increase when the cap on piece-work bonuses was raised by two-thirds. These increases were clearly tangible successes for the workers involved in the strike, but they did not entail any major sacrifice for those who owned the mines. For, while inflation had dissolved almost half the value of the labor of African workers during the course of the war, the suspension of the gold standard in 1918 granted the industry a five million pound premium on the sale of gold. The wage increases that were granted immediately before and during the strike cost the minelords less than a million pounds.[27]

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[25] TAD GNLB 312, 125/19/48 History of Strike, February 1920, Protector of Natives to D. N. L., 3 March 1920, and Tandy to DNL, 8 March, 1920.

[26] TAD GNLB 312, 125/19/48 History of Strike, February 1920, Bennett to DNL, 5 March, 1920. CAD JUS 268, 3/127/20 Industrial Unrest Natives 1920: Native Congress Reports on Activities, Moroney to Douglas, 25 February 1920. TAD GNLB 312, 125/19/48 Result of Inquest: Village Deep Riots, 1920, Heath, J. G. Magistrate for Inquests to Magistrate, Johannesburg, 24 April, 1920.

[27] Bonner, "The 1920 Black Mineworkers' Strike", 278. Union Statistics for Fifty Years.

But the workers achieved one other dramatic, short term gain. And it was this concession that suggests that the strike was--for the workers--an unambiguous victory. As the NRC later recounted:

> If the strike had not been stopped a very large percentage of the uncontracted labourers would have left which would have reduced the native labour strength to such an extent that many Mines could not have continued to work, and a thorough disorganisation of the native labour supply would have eventuated which would have taken many months to repair. .... For these reasons and after repeated and insistent demands by the Mine natives, the Gold Mining Industry decided to ... supply mine natives with necessary commodities such as blankets, clothing etc. ... in the Compounds at the lowest possible cost plus 5% to cover overhead charges etc. This intention was notified to the natives who on the strength of the promise that stores would be opened for them as soon as possible returned to work at their previous rates of wages.[28]

The Chamber sought to cushion mineworkers from the effects of inflation, and dampen the explosive politics of the trading stores dotted around the mines, by establishing wholesale outlets within the compounds. These efforts to isolate their workers from the attentions of "native truck" traders were quickly defeated in the courts and they were forced to establish stores in the townships and farms adjacent to mine properties. But the NRC stores, which lasted until the beginning of 1925, acted as a brake on the prices and retailing practices of the privately owned concession stores. "Since the trading stores have been opened and prices reduced", Taberer noted in 1921, "there have been no further demands from the natives for increased wages on any Gold Mine on the Witwatersrand".[29]

Notwithstanding these concessions on wages and mine stores, the minelords were well aware that the workers had agreed to return to work unsatisfied. The fabric of consent had been torn and there was much patchwork to be done. The consequences of the strike for the politics of the compounds were made very clear by an editorial in *Abantu Batho*, the voice of the Transvaal Native Congress:

> Today the trouble is inside the Compounds under Mr Taberer's control and the army rushed on people and many were wounded, there was bloodshed and some people were killed. Where was Teba? Who opened the gates for the army without his permission? The Chiefs and people are today asking where Teba was. We think they are right in so asking. We say so because we think that Mr Taberer as the Protector of Native labourers, ought to have been there, and if he stood at the gate and appealed to the police not to enter the compound or injure the people, there would have been no bloodshed. He should have defended even if they were in the wrong. At the Village Deep, natives did not allow the police to enter the Compound, they insisted in bringing about the mutual understanding, and we are given to understand that Mr Taberer was not there. Where had he gone to when he ought to have been there? We say that he was the only one to stop the police from entering the Compound. We do not know, fellow-countrymen, we will leave the matter there. We do not know what reports he has to send to the Chiefs about the dead people.[30]

Compound Discipline

Taberer's reputation as the arbiter of discontent had been badly tarnished by the violence of the police assaults on the central Witwatersrand. If the strike served to weaken Taberer's position at center stage in the political drama of the compounds, it gave new life to those who sought to restore discipline in the compounds. The events of February, 1920, served as the political baptism of the

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[28] CMA Native Labour--Miscellaneous, 1923, NRC Evidence, Select Committee ... into Native Trading on Mines, 15 April, 1921.

[29] The Star, 28 September 1920, "Native Strike: Three of the Causes". On the politics of "native truck trading" see Timothy Burke "Lifebuoy Men, Lux Women: Commodification, consumption and cleanliness in colonial Zimbabwe", diss. Johns Hopkins University, 1992, 122--155. CMA Native Labour--Miscellaneous, 1923, Outlines of the Evidence to be given by NRC to Select Committee into Native Trading by Mines, 15 April 1921.

[30] Abantu Batho, 18 March 1920.

newly formed Transvaal Compound Manager's Association. The CMA was the organized voice of all the compound managers on the Witwatersrand. Within months of the strike they offered a series of measures that would make "for better control of the natives" and, ultimately, sought to redefine the legal force of compound discipline. There efforts make it clear that much of the power that the mines exercised over their workers was based on an implicit, extra-legal understanding between the mine officials, the Native Affairs Department and the Police. This informal alliance was particularly vulnerable to the activities of the "educated class" of urban activists.

On March 25, a month after the end of the strike, the Compound Managers' Association suggested to the Executive committee of the Chamber that "all external windows in Mine Compounds be built up". The proposal which would have removed any remaining ambiguity about the purpose of the grim architecture of the compounds, was vetoed by the Mine Medical Officers Committee. Undaunted by this rebuttal the CMA offered another amendment to the politics of the Compounds. "The Indunas and Mabalans", they noted, "are in a position to exercise considerable influence over the rank and file". The position of Indunas had, from the first compounds on the Reef, been associated with the maintenance of managerial discipline. By expanding the category of privileged workers to include the Mabalans--the literate clerks that worked in every compound on the Reef--the CMA was aiming at one of the most important groups of educated Africans on the Rand. They noted that it was "very desirable at the present time to secure their unswerving loyalty to those in authority over them". Accordingly they suggested that, in addition to a wage increase, the mines provide free housing, food, and medical attention for the families of all Indunas and Mabalans. These measures were formally endorsed by the Chamber.[31]

Despite their attempts to secure the loyalty of the clerks in their own compounds, the Compound Managers were acutely sensitive to their own vulnerabilities to what they called "educated natives". In June 1921 they called a meeting with the Government Native Labour Director to discuss the legal basis of their authority in the compounds specifically because of the new dangers presented by schooled Africans. Devenish, from Robinson Deep, opened the conference by pointing out that compound managers routinely made arrests whose illegality "was overlooked by the Native Affairs Department and the Police in almost every case". The Compound Managers had repeated recourse to this strategy during the 1920 strike, and they wanted their powers of arrest to be legally recognized. These officials, the Native Labour Director responded, "were primarily responsible for the control of the vast population of natives working on the mines on the Reef, and if they did not take any action in arresting natives it would not be possible to put a timely stop to any disturbance". But, although he felt that their authority "required all the support the Government could give", the Director could not offer the managers the legal assurance they were looking for. C. A. Shaw, the manager of the Nourse Deep compound, revealed the source of their anxiety when he asked "how a compound manager could be protected in the event of his arresting an educated native who would not take the case to the Native Affairs Department or the Police but brought it up in Court?" With some foresight the Director replied that he "would welcome such a case coming forward, as it would be a means of expediting matters". Later in the decade, the state's vital interest in the discipline of the mine workforce was "expedited" in precisely this way. But state officials were already looking for common law interpretations that would support the enormous powers granted to compound managers. At the same meeting, the compound managers sought juridical powers to resolve cases of theft within the compounds, so as to avoid taking "a number of witnesses away from work in addition to the complainant and the culprit". This authority, which included the right to deduct fines from workers paychecks, was conceded to the compound managers. The legal basis for this extraordinary reorganization of judicial authority was taken from the two clauses in the Native Labour Regulation Act that dealt indirectly with the powers of compound managers. These clauses, empowered by the sweeping common law interpretations of magistrates, came to serve as the linchpin of the mines' authority over the lives of their workers. Clause No 15 reads:

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[31] CMA Native Labour--General, 1920, Wickers, N. Secretary TCMA to Secretary, Chamber of Mines, 25 March 1920. CMA Native Labour--General, 1920, Medical Officers' Sub-Committee, 14 May 1920. CMA Native Labour--General, 1920, Secretary, TCMA to Secretary, Chamber, 19 June 1920.

> Every compound manager shall, in respect of the native labourers housed in the compound under his charge, supervise and control them, investigate their complaints, and attend to their lawful requirements.

Over the course of the 1920s the responsibility to "control" the workers in the compounds, taken from a clause which in every other respect charged officials with the maintenance of consent, effectively conferred independent police and judicial powers on the compound managers. But it was not until later in the decade, when the paternalism of Taberer's rituals of consent had come under renewed assault, that the common law interpretations of compound managers' powers emerged from the magistrates' courts.[32]

In the meantime, Taberer was seen as "an undermining influence, against the prestige, and authority, of the Compound Managers". In a report to his supervisor, the Inspector of the NAD in the Johannesburg East district, attacked Taberer's role as an external court of appeal. "Amongst the Cape Colony natives", he wrote, "it is a custom, where they are dissatisfied, with things on a mine ... they will send a deputation straight off to Mr Taberer, over the head of the Compound Manager ... who ... can only accept the position however painful". He noted that "no Mine Manager likes the N. R. C. interference" and that the compound managers would prefer to be under the authority of Director of Native Labour--who was not responsible for recruitment. The inspector closed his report by stressing "the intolerable activities of the N. R. C.; whose, inspired, investigations, and their resulting actions, are inevitably dictated, by their needs in recruiting ... aggravated by the encouragement given to natives to appeal".[33] The rhetorical procedure embodied in Taberer's person posed a threat to the authority of the compound managers, the mine managers and the Native Affairs Department precisely because it offered workers at least the appearance of external appeal. And it was because the Native Recruiting Corporation needed to secure a measure of consent in order to provide the South African workforce before the Depression that Taberer's role was tolerated. This task was all the more urgent in the wake of the strike.

Charles Villiers, the Chairman of the Native Recruiting Corporation, made it very clear as soon as the strike ended that a great deal of ideological labor was required. "It must not be assumed," he wrote, "that all the labourers have returned in a contented frame of mind because so few time expired natives have given notice". This was a result of the "acute shortage of food in the Native Territories". Villiers, and Taberer, were convinced that the strike marked the beginning of progressive political struggle where "strikes will recur and each successive strike will be better organised than the last". To prevent this he argued that "every effort should be made to arrive at some means whereby the present conditions of labour amongst the natives ... can be ameliorated". In the face of the combined resistance of white workers and financial directors for an increase in African wages, the maintenance of consent in the compounds after 1920 came to rely almost exclusively on Taberer's rhetorical interventions.[34]

Rituals of Consent

Of course, the effort to restore consent on the mines in the wake of the strike involved much more than the management of the sociology of the compounds. It was in the townships that surrounded the mines, and amongst the urban Africans who lived there, that much of the ideological labor was done. In the wake of the 1920 strike an indigenous white liberalism--heavily subsidized by the Chamber of Mines--began to pay increasing attention to the political, intellectual and recreational demands of the urban African petty-bourgeoisie. These efforts had the temporary effect of prying apart the social and political allegiances of permanent urban dwellers and the migrants in the compounds. But urban peace was probably aided by the dramatic deflation that began in 1921, and which returned most of the pre-war value to wage labor.[35]

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[32] CMA Native Labour--Miscellaneous, 1921, Minutes of the Meeting between Transvaal Compound Managers' Association and Representatives of the NAD, 2 June 1921.

[33] TAD GNLB 334, 178/21/110 Compound Manages: Status and Authority Of, 1920--22, Inspector, NAD Johannesburg East to D. N. L., 7 July 1921.

[34] CMA Native Labour--General, 1920, C. W. Villiers to the Board of the N. R. C., 1/3/1920. As Bonner has noted, Villiers had the white workers in mind when he cast around for those who would have to make room.

Deflation was probably also the reason that wage protests subsided in the compounds after 1921. There were nonetheless many other issues that sparked political protests in the compounds. There were, for example, occasional outcries against the interventions of mine doctors and particularly the practice of arbitrary amputations and Taberer's actions during these protests reveal a formalized procedure for the discussion and resolution of mineworkers' grievances. On January 4, 1924, Taberer received a telephone call from the General Manager of Randfontein Estates, the multi-shaft complex on the western border of the Witwatersrand. He was told that the workers in the six compounds on the mine had resolved to call a meeting to protest against the activities of the mine medical officer. Taberer recommended to the SAP that "in the event of the natives having their meeting it would be most unwise to have any Police in the vicinity at all, as the mere presence of the Police would only incense the natives with perhaps very serious consequences". In the event the meeting that was held in the Block A Compound that Friday evening summoned Taberer and the West Rand Native Commissioner to hear their complaints. The following Tuesday, after consulting with the general manager, Taberer proceeded to the Block A Compound, outside of which an assembly of between four and five thousand workers awaited his arrival. "As is customary at meetings of this description", he later reported, "the spokesmen who were elected by the masses were sitting in the front row, and, on behalf of all native labourers employed by the Group, they placed their grievances before me". The workers' protest centered on the practice of surgery in the mine hospital. They complained that if a worker was admitted to the mine hospital "suffering from a slight wound, the wound was opened up and scarified without their permission"; "that as a result of the free use of the knife, they were now inclined to hide any minor injury"; "that their limbs were amputated without their permission". The workers pointed out that they had all worked on other gold mines and "that in no instance were they cut about and had their limbs amputated such as was the case at Randfontein". They concluded their presentations by demanding that the "knife and saw" be used sparingly and that the resident medical officer be dismissed. The assembly made a point of telling Taberer that, in other respects, "they were well satisfied with the general conditions ... on the Randfontein Mines".[36]

The form of the assembly at Randfontein reveals a rhetorical politics that was characteristic, and in some ways unique, to Taberer's tenure as Native Labour Advisor to the Chamber of Mines. The most obvious feature, which distinguished Taberer's meetings from those that preceded and followed, was his aversion to the use of police power. He was acutely aware that reliance on overt state violence weakened his own ideological position, and equally convinced of the lawful--in the fullest sense--nature of the workers' assemblies. He was also careful to stage the audience of his encounters in a manner that mimicked monarchical receptions. The workers waited upon his arrival, and presented their grievances to him. An ideological corollary of this arrangement was that Taberer was a single source of external authority. He worked hard to present his authority as both independent of mine management and the state, and indivisible. Like many of the labor officials on the mines Taberer was fluent in the Nguni languages and workers were encouraged to present their demands in their own words. Moreover he positioned workers' spokesmen as unchallenged democratic representatives. What made his meetings remarkable was that it was clear that he was participating in an argument that required concessions on his part before they could reach closure. He went out of his way to present the reasoning behind workers grievances, and tended to avoid the crude essentialisms his peers indulged ubiquitously. There were, however, some difficult obstacles.

His response to the Randfontein workers' charges of abusive surgery encountered one of these. "Confronted with a matter which is chiefly medical, and with a national prejudice against operations and amputations", Taberer reported, "I found it most difficult to get the natives to accept European ideas in these matters". And there were other constraints which Taberer tried to finesse by

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[35] David Coplan In Township Tonight! South Africa's Black City Music and Theatre (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1985) 113-142. Tim Cousens "Moralizing Leisure Time: the Transatlantic Connection and Black Johannesburg, 1918--1936" Industrialization and Social Change: African Class Formation, Culture and Consciousness, 1870-1930 eds. Shula Marks and Richard Rathbone (London: Longman, 1982) 314-337.

[36] CMA Native Labour--Miscellaneous, 1924-5, Taberer to Gemmill, Report on Visit to Randfontein Central, 8 January 1924.

restricting the terms of the argument. He told the assembly that "dismissal of the medical officer was out of the question" and that he "would not listen to a request of that nature". Always careful not to reject out of hand the workers' demands, Taberer "promised ... that I would make a personal inspection of the native hospital" and then return to the Block A Compound "when I would be able to explain more fully to them". But, in the end, Taberer's authority, in the compounds and at the Chamber, was dependent upon his ability to transmit some of the demands made between workers and capitalists. He did not hesitate to enforce the terms of consent that workers demanded of him. After the Randfontein meeting he wrote to William Gemmill, the general manager of the Chamber:

> It is imperative that every possible care should be taken to see that the undeniable consent of a native, or of his relatives if a minor, should be obtained before an amputation is carried out or an operation performed, and without this consent having been obtained a native should not be operated upon. I am of opinion that the national native prejudice against operations and amputations should always be borne in mind and as far as possible given consideration to by all Mine Medical Officers dealing with natives.

The following week the Chamber duly issued a memorandum enforcing Taberer's recommendations.[37]

The dialectic of capital and labor which Taberer straddled was never symmetrical, but over the course of the decade the terms of the relationship moved slowly but remorselessly against the workers. An ongoing process of scientific and bureaucratic rationalization saw the addition of powerful professional organizations in the form of the Compound Managers' Association and the Transvaal Mine Medical Officers' Association. As we will see in chapter three, new technologies changed the forms of underground work, and the corresponding political resources of workers and managers. But the most important changes were those which affected the regional political economy. In the countryside, in the 1920s, a vicious political struggle opened between undercapitalized land-owners and their tenant-laborers which, by the end of the decade, saw the expansion of the legal fabric of capitalist agriculture across much of the South African highveld. In a similarly contested manner, the state sought to reorganize the fiscal and political basis of local government in the labor reserves of the eastern Cape.[38]

The process of rationalization that was transforming rural politics also had effects on the mines recruiting apparatus. In the middle of 1923, the mines underwent another of the acute shortages of labor that had plagued the industry since the 1890s. At the heart of these seasonal crises was the time period of recruitment contracts. The "six-month contract" required workers to complete 180 shifts, which effectively held recruits on the Rand for eight or nine months. In effect the mines usually enjoyed a surplus of workers in the months in the summer, and a shortage during the harvesting and planting seasons. In June 1923, the Director of Native Labour, began to pressure the apprehensive Native Recruiting Corporation to enforce a "nine-month contract". The effect of this new contract, which would take most workers a year to complete, would be to break the seasonal basis of mine recruitment. But it would also disrupt the agricultural work cycle of most of the mines' recruits. Taking advantage of the seasonal surplus of labor at the beginning of 1924, the mines imposed a new nine months contract on workers from the Cape and Basutoland. This new contract, which effectively uprooted peasant recruits from an agricultural work cycle, was not well received. In May Taberer was sent on a tour of the "native districts" to hear the angry protests that erupted throughout the eastern Cape.[39]

His first meeting was held in the Herschel district in the north-eastern Cape. The resident magistrate was Taberer's friend, E. K. Whitehead, the same man who had hosted the 1913 Crown Mines enquiry. Once again Whitehead threw the state's weight behind Taberer's ideological labor.

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[37] CMA Native Labour--Miscellaneous, 1924-5, Taberer to Gemmill, Report on Visit to Randfontein Central, 8 January 1924, emphasis in original. BRA Health of Native on the Mines, vol 4, 44, 782, Gemmill to All Mine Managers, 21 January 1924.

[38] Helen Bradford A Taste of Freedom: The ICU in Rural South Africa (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987) 1-62. Beinart and Bundy, Hidden Struggles 138-165, 191-221.

[39] CMA Native Labour Supply, 1923, Report on Recruiting in Cape Province, C. W. Villiers, 26 July 1923.

The meeting coincided with the Magistrate's quarterly audience with all the chiefs and headmen in the district. Taberer rose to address the meeting after Whitehead had "offered his exceptional support". Taberer stressed that the industry had no intention of withdrawing the nine-months' contract, and warned the gathering that they would be displaced by Mozambican workers if they failed to enlist. The audience, made up almost entirely of senior men who had gathered to meet the magistrate, did not react in an antagonistic way. They assured Taberer that "their young men were remaining at home in the hope that the Mining Industry would, at no distant date, be compelled to revert" to the six months contract but that now that he had "personally assured them of the intentions of the Mining Industry and of the support which it was receiving in its attitude from the Government, the young men would respond and turn out to work". Taberer noted in his report to the Chamber that, given the failure of the crop and a shortage of food, young men of the district would shortly be compelled to leave their homes in search of work.

The following day he arrived in the East London area. After spending a day "interviewing responsible natives in the vicinity of the town", Taberer called a meeting at Newlands, 20 miles inland of the port. At this gathering "there was a very good percentage of the working class present". The audience reacted to his lectures on the virtues of the longer contract, machine work and deferred pay, along generational lines. Older men unanimously supported his claim that the new contract would benefit the people.

> The younger men (the workers) having heard what their Seniors had to say pretended that it was not the longer period of contract which is keeping them back ... but tried to excuse themselves ... by stating that the Railway fares were excessive, that the wages were very low ... and that they were afraid of being ill-treated as they were by the revolutionaries during the recent strike.[40]

It was "a simple matter" for him to demonstrate to the seniors that the "excuses made by the workmen were frivolous". Taberer left the meeting confident that the results of his exhortations would be an increase outflow of workers.

On the 11th of June, Taberer traveled inland across the Kei river to the Cofimvaba district. The meeting he held at the kraal of the Tembu chief, Siyabalala, faced a much hotter reception. Again, Taberer gave his presentation under the protection of the magistrate and backed by the Native Recruiting Corporation's District Superintendent and six recruiters. But this array of colonial authority did little to impress his audience. "These Tembus", he reported to Gemmill, "would have nothing to do with the nine months contract". After his speech, the crowd accused Taberer of violating the fabric of paternalism. They left him in little doubt as to their discontent with the new contract.

> They shewed their resentment to it in characteristically native manner--by averring that the conditions and treatment meted out to them on the mines were bad in the extreme. They accused me of doing nothing for them; arresting any who came to me with complaints; having all who complained of illness punished; keeping dogs in each compound to chase and bite them while they are being turned out to work in the early morning; giving them no compensation for accidents, &c. &c.

What was unusual about the Cofimvaba meeting was the hostility that Taberer faced from Siyabalala himself. In their complaints at Taberer's failure to support them, the crowd was "led by their Chief, who is very resentful at having had his annual Government allowance considerably reduced for his sympathetic attitude towards the Bull-Hoek fanatics". It is instructive that the hostility of his customary ally did not completely undermine Taberer's rhetorical position.

> Altogether it was a lively meeting. I was able to bring home to them--quite to their expectations and amusement--how cleverly they were lying, and the Magistrate lectured them in no uncertain terms.[41]

It is, however, also clear that the mobilization of labor from this district was not dependent upon the effective operation of consent. A visible and remorseless impoverishment would inevitably force the

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[40] CMA Native Labour--Miscellaneous, 1924-5, Taberer to Gemmill, 22 May 1924.

[41] CMA Native Labour--Miscellaneous, 1924-5, Taberer to Gemmill, 12 June 1924.

"large numbers of working men at their kraals" to take up wage labor. "They have very little food", Taberer reported, "and there is no grazing to speak of for their stock".

Over the next two months, Taberer's zig-zagging tour carried him through the major towns of the Transkei, Pondoland, East-Griqualand and up into Zululand. In each district he provided the Chamber with an overall assessment of food-stocks, crops and cattle fodder. And he held at least fourteen meetings. These were always held outside "under all weather conditions" and they lasted between three and five hours. Taberer used a carefully considered style at these meetings. "When he addresses the people at the meetings", *Abantu Batho* noted, "Mr Taberer often commences his speech by referring to Native Customs operating in the Native Territories". And the model he sought to reproduce was also very clear to those who watched him:

> Wherever he went oxen were and people were seen filled up with joy when they were feeding on meat and drinking beer like in the days of old, when the Country was ruled by Native Chiefs.[42]

After Cofimvaba, he did not face another unanimously hostile audience. His overall assessment to the Chamber concluded that the nine months' contract was "generally accepted among the Elders", but, to no-one's surprise, that "the labouring classes are not in favour of it". And there were several other things that workers were not happy about.

At many of the meetings audiences complained about the small amounts of cash paid out by the mines as compensation for deaths or injuries. In Pondoland, whence came many of the Randfontein workers, and in the Qumbu district, workers again "freely voiced their objections to amputations and to the opening up of small wounds for cleansing". In the wake of the 1924 elections, and the tightening of the color bar on the mines, workers attacked the brutal racial hierarchy of underground supervision:

> the workmen laid great stress on the fact European Overseers did not trouble to instruct new boys in their work and all that these overseers did was to stand over them and kick them while urging them to 'get on with it'.[43]

They were also adamant that the racial division undermined the value of their labor. "At every meeting", Taberer reported to his superiors, workers "stated that they did all the work and got insignificant pay, while the whitemen did no work at all and drew excessive pay". This argument was one which Taberer supported throughout his life, and his efforts to strengthen the position of African workers against their white working class supervisors, no doubt, served to strengthen his credibility. He was also careful to foster another affinity with the groups of male workers that attended his meetings.

Women were not permitted to attend the gatherings that Taberer addressed in the countryside. (Indeed, by 1927 women were demanding that he address them separately). In a similar manner to the critique of white workers, Taberer shared his audiences suspicions of the women living on the Witwatersrand. "There has been a fairly universal request", he reported after his meetings in Mt. Frere and Mt. Ayliff, "that Government be pressed to comb out of Johannesburg the thousands of native women and girls who have run away from their homes and who live along the reef by tempting young native workmen to spend their earnings on the Kaffir beer and other delicacies they keep on tap". Taberer's own accounts of African women tended to position them, like white workers, as a menace to the virtuous pursuits of African laborers. His otherwise liberal support for married housing, did not prevent him from supporting the application of the Native Urban Areas regulations for the "elimination of loose women" on the Witwatersrand. But the migrants' protests were also clearly intended to be humorous. By making jokes at the expense of their wives and daughters, migrants invoked gender solidarities against racial hierarchies. They protested against the introduction of the nine months' contract along these lines.

> They allege that their women folk go astray even when they are away from home for six months only, and state they what little continency some of their women may possess would

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42 Abantu Batho, 18 March 1920.

43 CMA Native Labour--Miscellaneous, 1924-5, Taberer to Gemmill, 12 September 1924.

be tested to breaking point if they stay away for the length of time necessary to complete 270 shifts.[44]

This opposition, of course, completely undermine the Chamber of Mines' determination to enforce the nine months' contract. Nonetheless, over the next three years the fate of the new contract hung in the balance. Migrants rarely missed an opportunity to call for the restoration of the six months' contract. And the minelords contemplated withdrawal when, towards the end of 1925, they faced what looked like being another good agricultural year in the reserves. In the meantime, the politics of speech had been reorganized by the rise of the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union of Africa.

Champion, Kadalie and the ICU

The ICU made its first sortie into mine politics at the beginning of 1923. On the 12th of February, the Union wrote to the Minister of Mines requesting that a Sanitarium be built for African workers, who--through sickness or injury--were unable to work or return to the countryside. The letter, carrying the weight of the minister with it, prompted some hasty consultations with the Department of Native Labour. A conference of the chairman of the Miners' Pthisis Board, the Office of the Director of Native Labour, and the Native Recruiting Corporation was called. Both Taberer, and E. K. Whitehead--of the Crown Mines enquiry--were present. These men were adamant that they did not consider that "Mr Clements Kadalie can be regarded as uttering the views of the native mine workers on the Witwatersrand". They suggested that the money would be better spent on an "adequate native hospital" in Johannesburg, or in support of the existing hospitals in the labor reserves. Of course, Kadalie had his own ideas about the ability of the white officials to speak for the mineworkers. "We do not at least quarrel with the personel of that Conference", he responded to the Secretary of Mines, "but we claim on the other hand to represent our own people and as we are exactly acquainted with their needs; not through the medium of outside information, but through having ourselves experienced such hardships". From the outset, the ideological conflict between the ICU and the Chamber of Mines was over the politics of representation.[45]

It was to be two more years before the Union was able to penetrate the sequestered world of the compounds. In the meantime, in alliance with the Young Communist League, a branch was established in Johannesburg in 1924. In September and October Kadalie held meetings in the disparate townships along the Reef, before settling on the mass meetings in Market Square that were to become the hallmark of the ICU. He moved permanently to the city in January 1925.[46]

Just over a month later, the first protest linked to the ICU was held in the Nourse Mine Compound. Along with City Deep, Crown Mines, and Robinson Deep, Nourse Mines was within an easy walk of the center of Johannesburg. The mine was on the southeastern border of Jeppestown and it also bordered on the Eastern Native Township. On the evening of March 9, about 600 workers, out of a total of more than 4,000, gathered outside the Nourse Mine compound to demand that the minimum wage on the mines be lifted from 1s/8d to 2s per shift. In his report to his superiors in London, the local director of the Central Mining Corporation, fingered the ICU. "An educated native Communist named 'Kadali' from Nyasaland is the 'star turn' agitator and is being carefully watched with a view of deportation". The strike marked an alliance between the ICU and a new category of unskilled workers, who were locked into low paying jobs as trammers and lashers by the tremendous increases in rock-breaking productivity that took place in the early part of the 1920s.

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[44] CMA Native Labour--Miscellaneous (2), 1927, Taberer to Gemmill, 21 December 1927. CMA Native Labour--Miscellaneous, 1924-5, Taberer to Gemmill, 24 August 1924. CMA Native Labour--Miscellaneous, 1927, Taberer to Gemmill, 17 October 1927. CMA Native Labour--Miscellaneous, 1924-5, Taberer to Gemmill, 16 September 1924.

[45] CAD MNW 675, MM2553/23, Kadalie to Malan, 12 February 1923. CAD MNW 675, MM2553/23, Chairman, Miners' Pthisis Board to Secretary for Mines and Industries, 23 March 1923. CAD MNW 675, MM2553/23, Kadalie to Secretary for Mines and Industries, 11 April 1923.

[46] Philip Bonner, "Division and Unity in the Struggle: African Politics on the Witwatersrand in the 1920s", Paper presented to the African Studies Institute, University of the Witwatersrand, 9 March 1992, 2.

Their demands were rejected by the Chamber, but that was not the end of either of the call for the two shilling minimum or the ICU.[47]

On the 7th May, 1925, Alison George Champion resigned from his job as a clerk at Crown Mines--and from his position as President of the Transvaal Mine Clerks' Association--and joined the ICU. Champion had worked at Crown Mines since June 1919. During this time he had worked as an informant for the Native Recruiting Corporation, and after attending meetings of the ICU, he was reported to have told his wife: "'I feel the call that I should leave ... my big salary and suffer with the people that I have been kraaling and marshalling for the capitalists, some of whom I shall never meet, in order to ameliorate my nation's conditions".[48] In July 1925 he began to address the meetings that the ICU called outside the Inchape Hall on Eloff Street Extension. The meetings were intended to draw workers from KwaMzilikazi, the central compound of the Native Recruiting Corporation. The Chamber's spies dutifully reported the provocative lines of his speeches to Wellbeloved, the Compound Manager at KwaMzilikazi. Champion remembered the 1920 strike, and he had thought about the implications for the mining industry.

> Had the natives been organised at the time of the strike on the mines, they would have succeeded in getting more money. They failed because they were not organised. To-day they are organised and those of you who have not joined the I. C. U. should do so at once.... If the natives strike, we can stop the mines from Randfontein to Springs. It will cost the mines thousands of pounds before they can get into running order again, and it would be cheaper for the mines to increase the natives' wages than face the position.[49]

There was, as Wellbeloved acknowledged, little that the Chamber could do to attack Champion directly. Aware that the ICU was excluded from most of the compounds, the Gold Producers' Committee resolved on a strategy of non-recognition in August. They refused to meet with the ICU, and on hearing that the Union was phoning up individual mine managers, they advised "that on no account must any recognition be accorded to any Native Trade Union, or grievances discussed with representatives of such Unions". From this point, until the late 1970s, the Chamber of Mines refused to acknowledge or answer the letters that were received at Hollard Street from African unions.[50]

Sending the ICU to Coventry obviously posed serious organizational difficulties for the Union. They had no means of raising the grievances of their member with mine managers, and no possibility of redress. The Union's members in the compounds were also completely isolated. After pointing out that they were "getting sack day after day" the workers in the Nourse Mine compound sent an eloquent appeal to Kadalie for intervention:

> Please come and help us we are burning off the fire the people say they want to join the ICU is like this they don't see the work of the ICU. The bosses are play fulls of the ICU all the boys will be finish of the ICU in Nourse Mine to be sack only through the ICU. Mr Kadalie your blanket is torn and its for you to mend it now with you coming to the Nourse Mine and see you personally in Compound they would join, we are not afraid come quick please if the people don't join here we will get little, and the white men will over power us we are in the ICU we off the Nourse Mine want you personally presents.[51]

But the Union lacked even the capacity to consult the workers in the compound. They could do little more than send a copy of the letter to the manager of the Nourse Mines, and submit it to the Wage Commission that was sitting in Cape Town.[52]

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47 BRA Private Letters from Johannesburg, 172, Jan-April 1925, Rogers, A. W. to Philips, Lionel, 11 March 1925.

48 Bradford, A Taste of Freedom 76.

49 CMA Industrial and Commercial Workers Union of Africa, 1925, Wellbeloved to Gemmill, 24 July 1925.

50 CMA Native Labour--Miscellaneous, 1925, Gemmill to All Mines, 8 August 1925.

51 CMA Industrial and Commercial Workers Union of Africa, 1925, ICU Members of Nourse Mine to Kadalie, 2 October 1925.

52 CMA Industrial and Commercial Workers Union of Africa, 1925, ICU to Mine Manager, Nourse Mines, 6 October 1925.

The complete exclusion of the ICU from the politics of the mines was effected in August. On September 20, 1925, Kadalie addressed a small meeting in Johannesburg and resolved on a new strategy for the Union's confrontation with the Chamber of Mines. At his earlier meetings' Champion had made a point of presenting Taberer and Wellbeloved as "tools of the capitalists", and he had stressed that the Native Labour Advisors told workers whatever "the Chamber instructs them to". But Kadalie now put forward a plan to attack the Native Recruiting Corporation at its weakest point:

> I am going to make enquiries in the Transkei into the recruiting of the natives for the mines. We must organize the mine natives and it must be done in their homes and through their chiefs.... The ICU movement has spread all over the country and now we have thousands of followers, but not enough; we want hundreds of thousands--enough to make a big noise--we must keep Mr Taberer and his Chief, Mr Gemmill, awake; they must not sleep.

In October Kadalie, Jabavu and others in the ICU leadership traveled down to the Eastern Cape to put into effect their strategy to displace the NRC. And the Chamber began to watch the ICU very closely.[53]

On the 13th October, Jabavu and Kadalie held a meeting in the Market Square in Kingwilliamstown that confirmed the Chamber's worst fears. Jabavu reported to the crowd that Kadalie "had just returned from a meeting at Madliki's Location and that the Meeting was attended by some 300 men, including many influential and well-known Headmen and that they were unanimous in embracing the doctrines of the ICU". The parody of Taberer's meetings--given by a white man who spoke fluent Xhosa--was all the more marked because Kadalie addressed his audiences in English. He had no qualms about revealing the rhetorical nature of his campaign against the Chamber. Kadalie announced to the meeting:

> At the beginning of this year, we resolved that our slogan was to be "Make as much row and agitation as to make shake the powers that be, to a sense of their duty to the black man".

The Union hosted two more meetings in Kingwilliamstown. At the last one, Kadalie made it clear that he saw the Native Recruiting Corporation as a model of political unity, and the target of ICU organizing. "It is necessary for us to unite and be like the Native Recruiting Corporation", he told the crowd. "They speak with one view. Those in England, Natal and Johannesburg are all alike, robbing and sucking the blood of the black man."[54]

When Kadalie returned to Johannesburg, he left a branch at Kingwilliamstown and the presence of these ICU militants wrought havoc in the NRC's most important district. In mid-November Wellbeloved reported to Taberer that "only last week our representative at that place addressed a big meeting in the district at which emissaries of the ICU were present in full force and they heckled and interrupted to such an extent that the meeting lasted for six hours". Recruitment meetings throughout the district were systematically disrupted by ICU representatives, and Wellbeloved worried that the NRC would soon be unable to "induce British South African Natives to engage for mine work".[55]

The Chamber did not hesitate to present the government with the magnitude of the ICU threat. The Gold Producers Committee referred Wellbeloved's detailed report on ICU activities to the Secretary of Native Affairs. Both Wellbeloved and Taberer argued that the consequences of allowing the ICU "to roam about the Native Territories and along the Reef sowing seeds of dissension" posed a threat to the security of the white state. Taberer couched his call for the removal of the ICU in the same paternalist vein that underwrote his own attention to the grievances of African workers. The South African state's action against the ICU needed to be more severe than the British government's suppression of communism because "the protection of an uncivilized mass of people

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[53] CMA Native Labour--Miscellaneous, 1925-6, Wellbeloved to Gemmill, "Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union of Africa", 21 September 1925. CMA Native Labour--Miscellaneous, Wellbeloved to Taberer, "Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union of Africa", 16 November 1925, emphasis in the original.

[54] CMA Native Labour--Miscellaneous, 1925-6, Wellbeloved to Gemmill, Cable, 18 October 1925. CMA Native Labour--Miscellaneous, 1925-6, Wellbeloved to Taberer, "Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union of Africa", 16 November 1925, emphasis in the original.

[55] CMA Native Labour--Miscellaneous, 1925-6, Wellbeloved to Taberer, "Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union of Africa", 16 November 1925.

calls for more drastic measures". Hertzog, of course, hardly needed encouragement from the Chamber to pay attention to the activities of the ICU. When John Martin, the new Chairman of Rand Mines, had his first interview with the Prime Minister in September 1926, Hertzog made it clear that "he was concerned about the subversive influences at work among the natives causing agitation and unrest". It was, however, to take the state over a year to draft a legislative response to the ICU. In the meantime the Union made hay in the reserves.

In the summer of 1927 Taberer embarked on another tour of the Eastern Cape. From East London to Kokstad workers clamored for an increase in the minimum wages paid to those who worked as trammers and lashers. The widespread discontent of those who found themselves stuck in these jobs was a function of the decline of hand-drilling--"the class of work most attractive to the natives of the Cape Province"--and a corresponding expansion of the poorly paid and labor intensive jobs that were required to move much greater quantities of rock broken by the machine drills. Workers pointed out to Taberer that they could obtain the daily wage of 1/8 at other industries without "having to work in the bowels of the earth with threatening falls of rock and bosses unnecessarily prodding them to greater efforts". And the meetings again singled out the glaring disparity between the highest wages of skilled African workers and the minimum wage of "an unskilled and incompetent European who is put to supervise them". But what distinguished Taberer's 1927 tour was not so much the discontent about wage levels but the specific form of wage claims. He reported to the Chamber:

> In the past natives have been satisfied to ask simply for a reasonable increase in their wages and while this still obtains in most districts, in those in which the ICU propaganda has spread they are now asking for a specific minimum rate of 4/- to 5/- per diem.

The activities of the Union provided a rhetorical form for workers' wage demands at a time when two intersecting crises were undermining the position of African migrant workers. On the mines, long-term low-wage work dominated more than half of the positions available to Africans underground. And, in the countryside, pastoral and arable subsistence was being devastated by the start of the multi-year drought that migrant workers remember as the famine of '33.[56]

The drought hit the labor reserves with varying severity, and the condition of agriculture shaped wage demands, resistance to the new nine months' contract, and support for the ICU. When Taberer left the Kingwilliamstown area in November he reported that, "in this area, which has experienced very severe droughts during the past four years, there seemed to be very few ablebodied natives hanging about their kraals". After travelling in a loop up to Qumbu, and then back to Umtata, Engcobo, and Queenstown he noted:

> An almost unprecedented drought is being experienced throughout these areas.... The majority of lands is not even ploughed up, much less has any seed been sown, and stock are in a very poor condition.

The migrants in these districts, with the exception of areas like Tsomo near Queenstown, had resigned themselves to the permanence of the nine months' contract, although they had begun to look for work in other industries. In the districts of Lusikisiki, Bizana, Tabankulu and Mt. Frere--which covered the coastal and highland areas of Pondoland and the border regions of East Griqualand--rain fell in the summer months of 1927. The migrants in these parts were, as Taberer put it, "comparatively well-off, it is only when they need cash that they sally forth to work". And they were incensed with the nine-months contract. Mine-work was still the wage-labor of choice for men in Pondoland, but, at meetings throughout the region, migrants told Taberer that they would rather look for work elsewhere than face a full year on the mines. "It is very difficult", he reported to the Chamber, "to get them to talk on any other subject". The migrants in Pondoland were defending an agricultural economy that had not yet fallen below subsistence levels. Their hostility to the nine-months contract was driven by their desire to defend a viable agriculture base. And it was this anger that fueled support for the ICU in both the countryside and the compounds.[57]

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[56] CMA Native Labour--Miscellaneous (2), 1927, Taberer to Gemmill, 21 December 1927.

[57] CMA Native Labour--Miscellaneous (2), 1927, Taberer to Gemmill, 28 October, 1927. CMA Native

Curbing the Union

The ICU did not simply abandon its attempts to intervene into the politics of the compounds after the Gold Producers Committee put into place its exclusion policy. They sought alternative ways of bringing pressure to bear upon the mine authorities, and the obvious candidate for intercession was the Native Affairs Department. The NAD, designed in part as a vehicle for workers' grievances, was well suited to the ICU's attempts to penetrate the politics of the Compounds. But, as we will see, the Chamber was able to exert sufficient pressure on the state to deny this ground to the Union. In February, 1927, the ICU petitioned the Sub-Commissioner of Natives on the East Rand to intervene into the dismissal from Springs Mines of an African worker dubbed "Isiah". The Union accused the mine's underground native supervisor of malicious prosecution and charged the mine, and the compound manager, with wrongful dismissal. An enquiry in the Springs Compound was called by the commissioner at which he demanded the presence of both the Compound Manager and Isiah. The dismissal was duly upheld. But the Compound Manager and the Chamber of Mines, far from feeling vindicated, were furious. In a letter that the Chamber forwarded to the Director of Native Labour, the Compound Manager complained that "this enquiry should never have been held, and it not only destroys my prestige among the natives but also that of the Sub-Native Commissioner". But the real issue was not the status of the compound manager, or of the NAD officials, but the procedures for the management of discontent. "Instead of complaining through the proper channels", the compound manager warned, "natives will be under the impression that all they have to do is complain to their Union when the matter will have to be taken up by the Native Affairs Department". And the dangers of this sort of intervention by the state were heightened by the widespread tendency amongst migrant workers to seek legal redress for their grievances. "As you are no doubt aware", he wrote to the Mine Manager, "the native loves litigation, and if this sort of thing is encouraged we will have endless trouble with a certain class (educated and semi-educated) of natives who imagine they have a grievance". He concluded his complaint by foreboding that if the state recognized the ICU there would be an "enormous amount of trouble in store for the Officials on the Mines".[58]

The Chamber was well aware of this fact, and they complained bitterly about this pregnant intervention into the politics of the compounds. The Director of Native Labour took shelter behind the Bureau's original ideological task. "It has long been the policy of this Department", he replied to William Gemmill, "to take cognizance of any alleged grievance of natives whether brought to notice by the natives in person, a solicitor, private individual or any Association or Union". But he hastened to add that no "person or association" was permitted to represent Africans at the ensuing inquiry. Whatever the strength of the bureaucratic procedures that had been institutionalized at the Native Labour Bureau, there is no other record in the chamber archives of the state's investigation of an ICU indictment of the mines. By 1928 the Union had been completely frozen out. If the NAD officials were not immediately intimidated by the Chamber's intervention, they certainly would have understood the significance of Hertzog's dismissal of Madeley, the Minister of Labour, in November, 1928, for simply receiving Clements Kadalie.[59]

But if the Union was denied access to the state, they also benefited in the short term from the stiffening of the politics of dispute in the compounds. This shift was only completed after Taberer's death in June 1932, but it was closely associated with the personal interventions of the man who replaced him as Native Labour Advisor, Henry Wellbeloved. On the 10th November, 1927, the workers at Randfontein Estates once again summoned Taberer to hear their grievances. But Taberer was away in the Transkei, and Wellbeloved went out to the mine. He arrived at the South Compound, to find an assembly of 4,000 Mpondo workers. Randfontein Estates was the last of the

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Labour--Miscellaneous (2), 1927, Taberer to Gemmill, 9 November, 1927. CMA Native Labour--Miscellaneous (2), 1927, Taberer to Gemmill, 17 November, 1927. CMA Native Labour--Miscellaneous (2), 1927, Taberer to Gemmill, 26 November, 1927.

[58] CMA Native Labour--Miscellaneous, 1927, Granger to Coaton, 14 February, 1927.

[59] CMA Native Labour--Miscellaneous, 1927, Director of Native Labour to General Manager, Chamber of Mines, 17 March, 1927. Eddie Roux, Time Longer than Rope: The Black Man's Struggle for Freedom in South Africa (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1948) 183.

gold mines to recruit workers outside of the Native Recruiting Corporation and many of these workers were recruited in Pondoland by the Mckenzie and Pritchard company. The workers presented Wellbeloved with two demands. They asked that the mines should pay the railfares of those who signed the nine-months contract. And, if that was not possible, recruited workers should be released from the hold of the contract after they had paid off the debts they had accumulated on leaving for the mines. These protests were directed against the expansion of the nine months contract. At the beginning of 1927 the NRC forced the Mckenzie--Pritchard company to extend the length of their contracts to nine months, and they placed severe restrictions on the number of workers the company could recruit for Randfontein Estates. These restrictions affected Mpondo workers particularly as the Mckenzie Contract had offered them unusual benefits. Chief amongst these before 1926 were a six month engagement period, and free return railfares. But the demands also reflected the activity of the ICU militants who were, as Wellbeloved noted, "continually preaching the abolition of the contract system".[60]

Wellbeloved's response to the workers' demands is instructive, and in many respects symbolic of the regime that dominated the mining industry after 1932. "The meeting was told", he later reported to the Chamber, "that free railfares would not be given to natives coming to the mines and, furthermore, those who came up under contract would be compelled to carry out the terms of their contracts". Wellbeloved's refusal to concede any ground, and his naked threat of the use of force, were not well received by the workers. The assembly, "not too pleased at not having gained any points", appointed a delegation to appeal to the ICU in Johannesburg. None of this was of much concern to the Mzilikazi compound manager. "I do not anticipate any serious difficulty arising as the result of this agitation", he concluded, "but should the Pondos decide to strike in support of their demands I am confident that the authorities will deal very severely with the leaders". In stark contrast to Taberer's work in the compounds, Wellbeloved was content, even eager, to rely on the coercive abilities of the state to maintain order in the compounds. This "confidence" in the police had, as we shall see, much to do with the coercive resources available to the state after the gold standard crisis, but it also reflected the state's assault on the workings of the public sphere. In 1928 the Nationalist party began to alter the law dramatically in order to restrict the activities of ICU activists, and, on a much smaller scale, magistrates endorsed compound managers' effective jurisdiction over the workings of justice on the mines. But to follow these changes, we must return to the workers at Randfontein Estates.[61]

Three days after Wellbeloved's meeting at the South Compound, on Sunday the 13th, the Mpondo workers at Randfontein Estates "invaded" the local municipal location. They had come, much to the surprise of Thomas Lechudi, the branch chairman, to enroll in the ICU. And there were more than 2,000 of them. The location superintendent discretely advised his police "on no account to interfere" with the workers. And the SAP refused to get involved; they pointed out that there was no law preventing gatherings of this sort. None of this was much appreciated by the superintendent, particularly since the ICU branch only had twenty local members. He complained bitterly to his boss in the Krugersdorp municipality:

> Now Sir, in my opinion, to turn my location into an enrolling station for the ICU is a bit thick, to hold meetings here I have no objection to, as I think it does a lot of good to let natives get their grievances off their chests, but it certainly is a horse of a different colour to bring hords of non-residents here for this purpose....[62]

The municipalities adjacent to the mines were not prepared to do the mines' ideological work for them. The Randfontein workers were prevented from entering the location, and for the next few months they were forced to pay their subscriptions to the Union secretary through the fence that separated the mine from the location.[63]

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[60] CMA Native Labour--Miscellaneous (2), 1927, Wellbeloved to Gemmill, 10 November, 1927 (Colonel Pritchard was the same man who replaced Taberer as Director of Native Labour. He moved into the recruiting business on his retirement in 1921).

[61] CMA Native Labour--Miscellaneous (2), 1927, Wellbeloved to Gemmill, 10 November, 1927.

[62] TAD GNLB 359, 142/24/110, Location Superintendent, Randfontein Location to Chief Sanitary Inspector, Krugersdorp, 14 November, 1927.

The political implications of the mineworkers moving into the locations to attend ICU meetings were not lost on the officials at the Native Labour Bureau or the Police. And they quickly communicated their anxieties to the Secretary of Native Affairs. His terse response pinpointed the legislative strategy that was at the heart of the state's response to the ICU:

> I beg to inform you that Regulations under the provisions of the Native Administration Act, 1927, for dealing with this and other matters are in process of being drafted.[64]

This new act--which had begun its life as the Sedition Bill--was gazetted in November 1927. At its heart, the "hostility clause" effectively criminalized the pillar of ICU activity. As Bonner has put it:

> If it was words above all, and the impunity with which they seemed to be uttered that electrified the ICU's constituents then the "hostility" clause of the Native Administration Act which proscribed "inciting hostility between the races" threatened to do incalculable harm. [65]

And, while the disintegration of the Union in 1928 was brought about by internal weaknesses, the Act ushered in a new form of legally sanctioned supervision of the public sphere. Magistrates in the Transkei quickly moved to apply the threat of the act against the many wandering agitators associated with the ICU, the Wellington Movement or the myriad of independent churches. The Act did precisely what it was intended to do--it provided a legal weapon for the state to deflate the rambunctious populism that was thriving in the countryside.[66]

Compound managers' powers of surveillance were similarly secured by the invention of a common law ruling on the Native Labour Regulation Act. As we have already seen, compound managers were well aware before 1928 that the ubiquitous practices of arrest, detention and arbitrary justice that constituted the bedrock of their power had no legislative basis.[67] And they had long feared that African workers would defend their rights under the law by turning to lawyers. The first challenges of this kind were heard in 1928. At Modder East, one of the savings association's (discussed in chapter 5) hired a lawyer to secure the mine's recognition of its constitution and officers. These intermediaries injected a powerful external voice into mine politics. For example, after the Chamber had rebuffed the Bantu Workers Mutual Aid Society, their lawyer responded to the mine secretary:

> You will, of course, realise that they are legally entitled to form such a society, without reference to the mine authority, and that their submission of the matter to the mine is made with a view to avoiding any unpleasantness in the future.... If the mine refuses in any way to countenance the formation of this society, I can only advise my clients of their legal position and leave it to the mine authorities to decide whether to dismiss the members of the society from the mine service on the expiration of their contracts.[68]

For the first time, mine managers faced the possibility that the barriers between the legal sphere of the mine, and the operations of the law outside, would be pulled down. And the intervention of lawyers on behalf of African workers, became all the more likely after the financial collapse of the ICU. The Union had opened a massive new market for white lawyers. "In Natal", as Eddie Roux put it, "one legal firm had in four months collected £3,334 11s in fees from the ICU". The first legal challenge to the powers of arrest and detention of the Mine Police came in December 1928, and the Chamber was well prepared to meet it.[69]

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[63] TAD GNLB 359, Native Sub-Commissioner to Director of Native Labour, 13 March, 1928.

[64] TAD GNLB 359, 142/24/110 Director of Native Labour to Native Sub Commissioner, Krugersdorp, 17 January, 1928.

[65] Bonner, "Division and Unity", 12. Bradford, A Taste of Freedom 91-93. Saul Dubow, Racial Segregation and the Origins of Apartheid in South Africa, 1919--36 (London: Macmillan, 1989) 42.

[66] CAD 1/BIZ 6/65, n1/9/3 Native politics and unrest: political organisations, Magistrate, Bizana to Chief Magistrate, Umtata, 14 December, 1927.

[67] CMA Native Labour--Miscellaneous, 1928, Manager and Secretary, Rand Mines to Gemmill, 28 February, 1928.

[68] CMA Native Labour--Miscellaneous, 1928, Barrett and Schech to Secretaries, Rand Mines, 4 June, 1928.

[69] Roux Time Longer than Rope 180.

A mine policeman from the West Rand Consolidated Mine brought a case of assault against two workers from the compound. The alleged assault had been prompted by the policeman's attempt to arrest one of the workers for blowing a police whistle inside the compound. And when the assault case was heard by the Krugersdorp magistrate, the workers were defended by a solicitor who presumably--there is no record of the case--challenged the legal basis of the arrest for whistle blowing. The case was thrown out, and the solicitor duly brought civil proceedings against the mine policeman for unlawful and malicious arrest, claiming £100 in damages. The possible repercussions of the suit--on the activities of lawyers, and order in the compounds--were not lost on the Chamber of Mines. At a meeting on the 13th December, the Gold Producers' Committee resolved "that an important matter of principle was involved, and that the Chamber should participate in the defence, employing such counsel as might be necessary".

The case was heard in the Krugersdorp magistrate's court, and the suite was rejected with costs. The magistrate, in defending the right of the policeman to make the arrest, invoked the powers and obligations of clauses 15 and 17(f) of the Native Labour Regulation Act. Under these clauses, as we have seen, compound managers were charged with the maintenance of "law and order" in the compounds. The magistrate pragmatically observed that in a compound "with some 5,000 to 6,000 natives the compound manager cannot himself maintain the required law and order". And that it was the established and "recognised custom in all compounds to have an induna and staff of police for this purpose". His judgement turned on the definition of any transgression in a compound--however trivial--as a serious offence. The presence of the 300,000 workers concentrated in compounds across the Witwatersrand weighed heavily on his mind. "The blowing of a police whistle by an unauthorised person in a compound was a serious offense, ... it caused unrest and excitement among other natives, and ... was a matter where the compound manager, for the purpose of maintaining law and order, was required to take action". This ruling, which was supported by one given by the Transvaal Supreme Court on a similar case in the Benoni Municipal Compound in 1926, effectively exploded the casual phrasing of the Act into a legal justification for the elaborate system of surveillance and control that was being practiced in the compounds. More significantly, by indemnifying compound managers and policemen, the rulings effectively froze lawyers out of the politics of the compounds. Without the possibility of awards for damages, only a tiny fraction of the mine workforce were able to employ lawyers. By the end of the decade the politics of dispute in the compounds and labor reserves had been dismantled. Wellbeloved's replacement of Taberer in June 1932 coincided with an increasing reliance on surveillance, and police intervention, for the maintenance of order in the compounds. After 1929, the maintenance of consent on the mines was sub-contracted to individual compound managers who had neither the power nor the interest to implement the sort of reforms that had bolstered Taberer's position. In the countryside the disintegration of the ICU and the operation of the Native Administration Act coincided with the famine and depression that lasted until 1933. And the mines could afford this neglect because for eight continuous years the labor supply provided more than their needs.

The change that shift that was experienced on the mines in the form of the collapse of centralized procedures of dispute, and an increased reliance on the police to maintain order in the compounds, saw much more important changes in the form of the state, and the nature of the law. As Dubow has observed:

> ... the 1927 Administration Act equipped the NAD with enormous powers. Outside the Cape the governor general was deemed 'Supreme Chief of all natives'--a throwback to the Shepstonian system in colonial Natal--which effectively granted the NAD unrestricted powers to govern the reserves by proclamation.

But the law also enshrined "native law and custom" as part of its intention to remove the bulk of rural Africans from civil society.[70]

Epilogue & Conclusion

We can now return to the workers in the Marievale compound. On the 25th of February, 1940--some three weeks before the attempted march to find Taberer at KwaMzilikazi--the workers

[70] Dubow, Racial Segregation 139-143.

had held another meeting inside the compound. At this meeting the workers complained about being beaten by white workers underground, and they decided to demand the appointment of an Underground Supervisor--the official, charged with the investigation of underground complaints, invented by the Crown Mines Inquiry. The workers called on the Marievale compound manager to attend the meeting in order to receive their complaints and hear their demands. He refused, and informed the messengers, that if the workers wanted to see him they should come to his office. The compound managers response did not go down well. The assembly resolved that if the compound manager refused to see them, they would demand an interview with the general manager. After stoning the windows of the compound kitchen, the workers burst out of the compound gate and headed towards the mine manager's house. The compound manager and his assistants now abandoned their offices and drove their cars through the crowd of workers. At the same time it began to rain heavily. This combined assault was enough to persuade all but a few of the workers to return to the compound. A persistent handful made their way to the manager's house where they stoned the mine police, the indunas, and the compound manager's car without success, before retreating to the compound. By the time the police arrived, the workers were all back in their rooms inside the compound. The police rounded up and interrogated the men they described as "the ringleaders, or spokesmen". And they arrested six of the workers, three amongst them for "inciting".[71]

There are some remarkable continuities in the elements of discontent at the Marievale protest, and the Crown Mines inquiry. In both cases, underground assaults and wage rates formed the foundation of workers' grievances. But there are also striking differences. The Marievale workers accused their compound manager of repeatedly ignoring their grievances. And his refusal to attend the workers assembly was a flagrant violation of the etiquette of dispute that operated in the compounds in the 1920s. And, finally, of course, there was the critical role of the South African Police. The Police interrogated spokesmen they had "rounded up" in order to discover the roots of what they saw as a "disturbance". And they arrested these same workers for "inciting". Finally, in these moments of crises it was the police who did most of the negotiating with protesting workers.

By the end of the 1930s, the management of order in the compounds had come to rely to an extra-ordinary degree on the operations of the South African Police. Nowhere was this more evident than in the Chamber's rhetorical position. P. M. Anderson, the Managing Director of the Union Corporation, and the second most powerful man in the mining industry, put it succinctly. "It was impossible", he pointed out to the N. A. D., "for the Mines to discuss matters of wages and conditions with these thousands of Natives, many of whom are incapable of understanding the position." And as Moodie has pointed out, he underscored the pivotal position of the South African Police in the maintenance of order in the event of a strike threat: "We shall call out the police and arrest some of the ring leaders and all we shall tell the Natives is that their grievances will be discussed with the Native Affairs Department with their indunas".[72]

It remains for us to answer the question: Why did the workers of the Marievale compound want to march the thirty-five miles to kwaMzilikazi in order to present their demands to Taberer? It is possible that the workers simply wanted to return home, and since KwaMzilikazi was also the point from which most migrants entered the Witwatersrand, it would be logical for them to return that way. If that was the case we might have expected the workers to demand release from their contracts. But what if we take them at their words? If we consider the dramatic events of the protest that took place three weeks before the attempted march, and the resolutely peaceful manner in which the workers behaved during the second protest, it is reasonable to suggest that the workers were looking for a way to reinstate the politics of consent that had operated in the compounds during Taberer's tenure. The demand to return to KwaMzilikazi, which was repeated over and over during the second world war, was an attempt to restore the inter-subjective forms of dipute that had formed the basis of consent from the 1913 Crown Mines Inquiry to the end of the 1920s.

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[71] CAD NTS 7675, 102/333(1) Witwatersrand Mines Native Unrest General File, 1938--47, Deputy Commissioner, Witwatersrand Division, SAP to Native Labour Advisor, TCM, 28 February, 1940.

[72] T. Dunbar Moodie, "The South African State and Industrial Conflict in the 1940s", International Journal of African Historical Studies, 21: 1 (1988) 30.